



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wilton, WI
15th Sunday after Pentecost
September 13, 2020
**Inviting People to Journey with Christ's
Family in Spreading God's Love and Mercy**

In today's second reading Paul questions why we judge one another, since we all stand before the judgment of God. Yet we do sin against one another, and Jesus' challenge that we forgive seventy-seven times reveals God's boundless mercy. When we hear the words of forgiveness in worship and sign ourselves with the cross, we are renewed in baptism to be signs of reconciliation in the world.

Gathering

*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God**

Hymn

"Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"

**Come, thou fount of ev'ry blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of thy redeeming love.**

**Here I raise mine Ebenezer;
Hither by thy help I'm come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed his precious blood.**

**O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wand'ring heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take an seal it,
Seal it for the courts above.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Word

*God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.**

FIRST READING

After Jacob's death the brothers of Joseph begged for forgiveness for the crime they had done against him. You intended to do me harm, Joseph said, but God used this as an opportunity to do good and save many lives.

Genesis 50:15-21

¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" ¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

P: The word of the Lord. C: **Thanks be to God.**

Psalms 103:8-13

⁸ LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love;
⁹ you will not always accuse us,
nor will you keep your anger forever.
¹⁰ You have not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor repaid us according to our iniquities.
¹¹ For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is your steadfast love for those who fear you.
¹² As far as the east is from the west,
so far have you removed our transgressions from us.
¹³ As a father has compassion for his children,
so you have compassion for those who fear you, O LORD.

SECOND READING

The Christian community has significant struggles with diversity. Here Paul helps us understand that despite different practices in worship and personal piety, we do not judge one another. All Christians belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who died for all of us and will judge each of us.

Romans 14:1-12

¹Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

P: The word of the Lord. **C: Thanks be to God.**

Gospel

When Peter asks about the limits of forgiveness, Jesus responds with a parable that suggests human forgiveness should mirror the unlimited mercy of God.

The gospel according to Matthew 18:21-35

Glory to you, O Lord.

²¹Peter came and said to [Jesus], "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

P: The gospel of the Lord. **C: Praise to You, O Christ.**

Sermon

Many of us have seen court-based television shows with a person suing another person for alleged wrongdoing. The court room is filled with many persons: lawyers, a judge, jury members, witnesses, spectators, etc... Frequently, we see and hear anger in the voice of the one who is suing. They are uncompromising. They bad mouth the alleged wrongdoer calling them names, making disparaging remarks, and so forth. They focus on the other's failings, their omissions and commissions. Perhaps, they are suing in hopes of getting an exorbitant amount of money. Perhaps they are seeking to convince the judge and jury that the alleged wrongdoer deserves the maximum sentence. Their focus is an "eye for an eye." They want vindication, and believe that this is the only way that justice will be done. In their evil thinking, in their sinfulness, they forget about mercy and forgiveness.

Our gospel passage for today seeks to show us a better way. It is a continuation of our passage of last week. We recall the forgiveness that we are to have for the one sheep that has gone astray. We are also reminded of Peter's question regarding the church and how often we should forgive another. Peter suggests...seven times. Jesus replies, "...seventy-seven times." Peter is apparently thinking that forgiving someone seven times is plenty! But, Jesus tells him that it is not enough. Jesus' response means that we should not even count the number of times that we forgive another person! We are to forgive them over and over again!

Our pericope for today includes a story. It begins with a king forgiving his servant a huge sum of money, or denarii. Per Karl Jacobson, "A denarius (plural = denarii) is a small silver coin that was roughly the daily wage for the typical worker." Jacobson states, "The king in our parable is owed 10,000 talents, or about 150,000 years worth of income..." (Working Preacher) This amount would not only be too much for one person to pay, but too much for that person's children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so on for many generations! Even if the person's entire family had been indentured into servitude for generations and generations to come, they would not have enough money to pay this debt!

This story, unlike some stories in the Bible, speaks for itself. The immense debt that was forgiven by the king, is far beyond what we can imagine. Yet, the servant did not learn his lesson. The kindness and mercy shown him by the king, does not lead the servant to do likewise. Instead of forgiving the much, much smaller debt of the person who owed the servant money, the servant hardened his heart. Rather than demonstrating the same kind of forgiveness and mercy that he had received, the servant responded with sinfulness and evil.

Lest we think that this example of Christian forgiveness is unlikely in the present day, I would like to share a story with you from the recent past. This is a true story. I know the young man, and I knew his wife. While it is a sad remembrance, its larger message speaks to us of how we as Christian's are to honor God, our King; God who models for us how to forgive, God who forgives us when we do not deserve it, God who wants us to demonstrate forgiveness and mercy to others.

The young man's wife was driving her car on a freeway heading home. At one point in her journey, there was some highway construction. A man driving a commercial truck and another car in front of her car, slowed down. The young woman slowed her car, as well. So, behind the first truck, was a car with a single woman passenger. Next, was the young woman's car. And all of these vehicles were moving slowly around the construction zone.

Behind the three vehicles was a second commercial truck. The driver had been up for many hours. I do not know all the details, but I imagine that his company, his boss, his supervisor, had given him a schedule regarding when he needed to deliver the product in his truck. If he didn't deliver it on time, he would be in trouble.

The second commercial driver, lacking sleep, was either not paying attention to the situation ahead, or perhaps was dozing. His truck ran into the young woman's car, and her car ran into the other car, which ran into the first truck. The woman in the first car was killed immediately. The young woman was transported to a hospital where she died hours later.

You can imagine the grief and sadness for the young man, her husband, when he heard the news. I remember the call I received from the young man's mother telling me about the accident; wanting me to know what had happened before I heard it on the news. It was an incredibly sad time for all of us who knew the young

couple. But even in the midst of this sadness, there were three things that brought a ray of God's love, of God's grace to this horrible situation.

Another friend of mine had heard about the accident on the radio. Without knowing that it was the daughter-in-law of my other friend, she started praying for the persons involved. She prayed for the young woman's well-being, even though she had no idea that I knew the young woman. As a Christian, my friend prayed at that time of great need. Later, when I told her who the young woman was, she attended the young woman's funeral with me.

Another ray of God's love and grace occurred at the pre-trial or hearing. The judge asked the young man what he wanted to see happen to the commercial driver of the second truck. We can imagine the pain, the anguish, the immense sadness that this young man was experiencing. He could have said, I want to see him go to prison for the rest of his life! He could have said, I want vindication! He could have said any number of negative, unforgiving things about the driver. But he didn't. The young man said that he did not want the driver to be given prison time. He did not want the truck driver to be taken away from his family. He did not want to cause the driver's family undue hardship. He did not want the driver's family to be without someone to provide for them. He did not want the driver's wife and children to have to live without their husband or father. In short, the young man did not seek revenge in his response to the driver for what had happened! He did not inflict more pain on the driver, who was already filled with sadness. He did not inflict more pain on the driver's wife and children. The young man did not seek vengeance. Rather, the young man exhibited forgiveness, even though the young man's loss was a priceless loss.

The young man is a Christian. His message to the driver and the driver's family communicated a message of God's forgiveness and mercy. A quest for vindication and holding on to hate, could have destroyed both of their families, for hate does little but to breed more hate. Instead, the young man's response allowed the driver and his family to stay together, and to receive this message, this amazing message, of forgiveness.

But there is more to the story. The husband of the other woman who was killed, did not seek a prison term for the driver, either. While I do not know who spoke first at the pre-trial or hearing, perhaps the young man's willingness to forgive encouraged the other man to forgive, as well. Rather than a message of hate breeding more hate, this story is a message of forgiveness and mercy for one person, leading to another person

offering forgiveness and mercy, too. It is what the king wanted the servant in our pericope to do, but what he did not do. The king wanted his servant to offer forgiveness and mercy, as the king had done for the servant.

In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, which we use in the ELCA, we hear these words in the Lord's Prayer, "...And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors..." (Matthew 6:12). Jesus gave us these words, and he asked us to say them, often. When we take them to heart, we remember how important it is for us to forgive our debtors. God forgives us our debts, and we are to forgive our debtors, too!

Jesus calls us as Christians to demonstrate forgiveness and mercy toward one another. For Jesus died on the cross to atone for the sins of all humanity. The heavy burden, the weight of humanity's sins could only be redeemed by a divine person. Through the shedding of Christ's innocent and precious blood, we are forgiven. Jesus bore the sins of the world, so that all who believe in him might have eternal life. This is God's love. This is God's forgiveness. This is God's mercy. This is God's grace freely given to us. How can we not forgive one another, when God has forgiven, and continues to forgive, us? May we pray, and truly mean, "...And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors..." Amen.

Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

You welcome us when we are weak in faith. Uphold your church throughout the world; make it a place of welcome. Strengthen faith through Bible studies and Sunday schools, confirmation classes and youth ministries. Nurture new ministries of education and growth, especially children and their families reading Story Bibles, and other daily reading through the Epistles. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

The heights of the heavens show us the vastness of your steadfast love. Have compassion on your creation. Where human selfishness has brought ruin and destruction, we look to you to heal, renew, and redeem your world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Make your ways known to the nations. Speak kindness to our bitter grudges. Settle our hearts when we want to settle accounts with violence. Encourage those who protest to do so peacefully and non-violently. Bless our leaders with patience and wisdom. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bring healing and justice wherever harm is dealt. Provide vindication for all who are oppressed. Free victims of human trafficking and forced labor; deliver all who are bound by debt. Feed all who hunger, and guard refugees fleeing famine, poverty, and war. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Teach us to forgive. Remind us that you do not always accuse us. Still our tongues when we are tempted to pass judgment and argue over opinions. Make this congregation a community of mercy for one another and for all our neighbors. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Whether we live or whether we die, we are yours. We thank you for those who have showed us faithfulness, for the knees that taught us how to bow to you and the tongues that taught us to praise you. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Tend to all in need of your compassion. Hear the cries of those awaiting justice and those yearning for forgiveness. Give community to the lonely and neighbors to the outcast. Shelter all who are vulnerable in body, mind, or spirit, especially Katie, Dakota, Carla, Ruth, Judy, Alrita, Dick, Lisa, Pam, Curt, Deb, Lois, Karl, Kurt, Kari, Tessa, Doug, Chris, and all those we name aloud and in our hearts. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

Blessing

**Jesus calls us o’er the tumult
Of our life’s wild, restless sea;
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
Saying “Christian, follow me!”**

**In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil and hours of ease;
Still He calls in care and pleasures,
“Christian, love me more than these!”**

**Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,
Savior, may we hear thy call,
Give our hearts to thine obedience,
Serve and love thee best of all.**

P: Go in peace. Remember the poor.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

IN OUR PRAYERS

Katie Wallace, Bill Collar, Dakota Holiday, Carla Von Haden, Ruth Johnson, Judy Bever, Alrita Ornes, Dick Krause, Lisa Rhodes, Pam Liefke, Curt Brueggen, Deb Paeth, Lois Reineke, Tessa Klipstein, Kurt, Kari & Karl Radke.

IN THE MILITARY

Jacob Picha, Todd Nofsinger, Dylan Dougherty, Danelle Dougherty, Seth Tormoen, Robert Cale.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WELCA GENERAL MEETING

The W-ELCA general meeting is this Tuesday, September 15, at 10:00 AM. Following the meeting the ladies will be packing quilts for shipment to Lutheran World Relief. All ladies of the church are welcome to attend.

ELCA WORLD HUNGER

ELCA World Hunger, like many organizations that work to end hunger, has experienced a decline in donations because churches are not operating in their normal capacity. Yet, due to the pandemic, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people that are experiencing food insecurity and acute hunger. **To help support ELCA World Hunger, a virtual benefit for ELCA World Hunger entitled "Hunger in the Time of Covid-19; Life for Today & Hope for Tomorrow" will be held on September 24th at 7 pm.** This will be led by ELCA Presiding Bishop Eaton, Rick Steves, and Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee. We encourage you to participate in this event.. Register at: <https://community.elca.org/online-registration/sept-24-rick-steves-virtual-hunger-event>

CONTACTS DURING CORONAVIRUS CLOSURE

In case of emergency, contact Pastor Cathleen, via text, 608-865-1074, Justin Arndt (608-435-6336) (414-587-6642) or Nalani Bever (608-387-2311).

To activate the prayer chain, please contact Nalani or Louise Buchholz (608-435-6435).

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FACEBOOK!! Home page: St. Paul's Lutheran Church Wilton WI

*The Sunday Assembly, Lorraine S. Brugh, Gordon W. Lathrop, Augsburg Fortress, 2008

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9/9/2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On Friday, I read an article entitled, "Holmen Boys & Girls club opens" (Pat McKnight, *La Crosse Tribune*, Friday, September 11, 2020, p. A4). The article was about the new youth club and community center in the former Festival Food store in Holmen. In addition to the Boys and Girls Club, the community center portion will "house various programming such as the senior nutrition site, classes and other community activities."

What is unique about this facility, is that it is "the only multi-generational Boys & Girls Club facility in the country." These words surprised me. It seemed strange to think that no other Boys & Girls club in the United States was in a facility that also served persons of other ages.

The information is timely, because today is National Grandparent's Day! According to an online article, "The purpose of the day is to honor grandparents, give them an opportunity to show love for their children's children, and help children become aware of the strength, information, and guidance older people can offer." (Sandra Diamond Fox, *Newstimes*, Thursday, September 8, 2011).

These words made me think about places where multi-generational activities occur. Certainly, sports arenas, gymnasiums, bowling alleys, concert halls, YMCA's and YWCA's, are a few of the places where people of all ages can meet. In addition, families may meet in multi-generational gatherings for family reunions, birthdays, weddings, etc... But, the building that truly brings persons together in a unique way, is the church. The church is multi-generational. Yes, we do have separate activities for young persons--Sunday School, Confirmation classes, and youth activities. And we do have the W-ELCA group for women, and in the past, we did have a men's group. But, in many ways, the primary purpose of the church building, is multi-generational worship. We are not separated into age groups. Our worship services include the tiniest babies to the oldest members of the assembly. Let us celebrate our multi-generational family!

Peace,

Pastor Cathy