

Home Service for September 13, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Although we cannot meet together in the church building we can share worship together in our individual homes. We will continue to work to stay connected and be there for each other during the difficult time. We are going through something never experience before. I hope this will help you worship God today with those who are in your home. Add hymns if possible, too.

Gathering Prayer:

God of mercy, we come before You thirsty for Your Word, to learn and relearn what really matters in this world. Fill us with a desire to be your people and to worship you in truth. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Gracious God, renew our minds with the power of Your Holy Spirit. Cleanse our spirits with the mercy of your grace. Bring us into fellowship with one another and grant us courage to defend the lowly. Part the waters of our troubled thoughts, that we might see others as you see them. Protect us with your powerful hand, that we might sing of your faithfulness and dance to your glory. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Merciful God, we are ever in need of your grace and your mercy. When we have injured your little ones, forgive us. When we have laughed at others' misfortunes, pardon us. When we have belittled the weak, humble us. Help us walk the trials of life with your powerful hope and your loving grace. Amen.

Words of Assurance

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, the forces of death would have devoured us whole. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, we would have fallen to the sword or been drowned by the sea. Dance and sing to the Lord, who is on the side of all God's children.

Prayers of the People:

Lord, we love the drama of the parting of the water. God provided the support structure for this awesome task. We are just like Moses. AS he did so many years ago we too can count on that God will give us the strength, the tools, the support that we need. What do we need to fear? This day we bring before God the names of people and situations that lay heavily on our hearts. We feel powerless to bring the healing words of hope, and so we offer these situations to God for God's compassionate mercy. Our trust in God is rightly placed. For God hears our prayers and will respond. We can count on God to be present with us and with all those in need. Now it is our turn to respond to God's call with a fervent yes, trusting in God's presence and guidance. Let us go forth to serve joyfully and confidently in God's world. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Exodus 14:19-31

Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them,²⁰ coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided,²² and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

²³ The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. ²⁴ During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. ²⁵ He jammed^[a] the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.” ²⁷ Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward^[b] it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. ²⁸ The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

²⁹ But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. ³⁰ That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. ³¹ And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 14:1-12

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister^[a]? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: “‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’”^[b]

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

²² Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. ^[a]

²³ “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold ^[b] was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. ^[c] He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹ “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

³⁰ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Message

While reading the Gospel Lesson, my thoughts were pulled to the Lord’s Prayer, which we all said just a few minutes ago. There is one line that I wonder how many times I have said it without really thinking about what I was actually praying for. That line is: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” I think it’s fair to say that most of the time, we pray this prayer without thinking deeply about what we are saying. But today’s teaching from Jesus forces us to give serious thought to our practice of forgiveness towards others, especially as it relates to God’s forgiveness towards us.

As I look back on my life, I have to admit that I have messed up more times than I would like to admit. We all mess up a lot in our lives. We sin against God and our neighbor. When we go to God again and again seeking God's forgiveness, then Christ tells us, the Father will generously bestow that forgiveness. But what did we pray? We prayed: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." So we are saying we know that if we cannot in turn offer the same generous forgiveness to those who have sinned against us, then God's forgiveness may not be so readily available. Do you see what I'm getting at? The message from the Gospel I am hearing is that God does not punish us for the bad things we do; rather, God punishes us for the good things we do not do, our failure to be generous with others as God in Christ Jesus has been generous with us. In other words God is so generous with His forgiveness of our sins and we have prayed that He does so based on us being generous with our forgiveness.

Forgiveness is serious business. And I do not in any way want to diminish either the seriousness of our failures, nor the extreme difficulty in forgiving those who have wronged us. If we are to receive God's forgiveness, it requires that we repent of our wrongdoing. This means we have to acknowledge that we were wrong, we have to approach God in humility, and we have to seek God's grace. In other words, we essentially turn ourselves over to the mercy of God. Forgiveness is not just like some Christmas present. Forgiveness requires a change of our hearts, and that results in a change of our lives.

The forgiveness we share with others should not be bestowed lightly. There are terrible, terrible things that people do to one another in this world. Children are abandoned or abused by their parents. Thieves rob us of our material goods and our sense of security. Terrorists kill innocent civilians in an effort to get some attention. People lie to us, take advantage of us, and bully us. And many of us, no doubt, have been on the receiving end of such hurt at times. We know it is not easy to forgive, nor is it appropriate to just flippantly forgive such harm. But if, in time, the person who has wronged us seeks us out, acknowledges their wrongdoing, and genuinely asks for our forgiveness, then Christ's message to us this morning is that we should not withhold it. And if we find it difficult to forgive the person who has hurt us, then at the very least, we should pray to God to help us do what needs to be done. Maybe even say a prayer that goes something like this, "God, will you forgive this person for the hurt they have caused me? And in turn, God, please help me to forgive them as well. Amen."

God does not forgive our sins easily, nor does God expect us to simply blow off the deep pain that others sometimes cause us. But when we can acknowledge the

cost of our own mistakes, and let go of the pain and hurt that others have caused us, then we will find ourselves free of a great burden. Forgiveness is life-giving. It is an important part of the abundant life Christ has promised to those who follow him. Forgiveness is the way of life that will mark out the new covenant community. Jesus' disciples, meaning us, are to be forgiving people, and we must together be a community of forgiveness.

Jesus was reminding us to forgive others as our acceptance of God's forgiveness. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." If we are not willing to share the generous forgiveness that God has shared with us, then we cannot expect that God will continually be so merciful. If our hearts are open, able, and willing to forgive others, it will also be open to receive God's love and forgiveness. If our hearts are not able to do one, they won't be able to do the other.

We can allow ourselves to be robbed of life as we keep pain and hurt locked up inside us, or we can let it go. The key to letting it go is forgiveness; allowing ourselves to forgive and to be forgiven. But grace will not operate if it's not embraced wholeheartedly. There is a direct connection between God's saving work on our behalf and the behavior that is expected of the family of God. Our lives must make obvious who God is and what God is like. So let us move and live in God's grace, extending to others what has been so freely given to us.

Let us Pray: Gracious and loving God, please enable us to accept one another as You have accepted us, so that we may bring praise to You! When we pray let us think about what we are praying and truly mean it in our hearts. Let us all make an effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification, and may Your hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in You, so that we may overflow with the power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Benediction:

As you go forth into this week, plunge into the waters of life unafraid, for God goes with us. Move forward in life with purpose and passion, for Christ is our guide and guardian. Live as people of powerful hope, for the Spirit renews us each and every day. Go with God's blessings. Amen.