

Home Service for September 13, 2026

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Forgiveness is a complex notion. Forgiving ourselves and forgiving others can be equally challenging, but even more so when oppression and injustice are part of the story. May God guide our forgiving and our living, to embrace the deeper truth of Christ's teachings.

Call to Worship:

Sing praise to God, our Creator and Redeemer.

Sing praise to Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Sing praise to the Spirit, who has called us to worship this day.

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, thank you for the great mercy and grace that draw us close to your holiness. Flow through our worship and through our lives with your holy presence and your forgiving grace, that we may be people of holy love and gracious forgiveness. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Gracious God, we want to be as grace-filled with ourselves and with others as you are. But honestly, it's easier to sing about grace than it is to offer it freely and abundantly. Help us put our songs into action, our words of yearning into lives filled with mercy and forgiveness—for ourselves and for others. One time, seven times, or seventy-seven times, each moment of grace matters and makes us better. Let your grace flow through our lives so abundantly that it overflows into every situation, protecting and preserving everyone it touches. In your love and grace, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

My friends, we belong to God, we belong to Christ.

Christ's amazing grace saves and redeems.

Christ's grace is enough for all.

Read Exodus 15:1b-11, 20-21

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

“I will sing to the Lord,
for he is highly exalted.

Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.

² “The Lord is my strength and my defense^[a];
he has become my salvation.

He is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

³ The Lord is a warrior;
the Lord is his name.

⁴ Pharaoh’s chariots and his army
he has hurled into the sea.

The best of Pharaoh’s officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.^[b]

⁵ The deep waters have covered them;
they sank to the depths like a stone.

⁶ Your right hand, Lord,
was majestic in power.

Your right hand, Lord,
shattered the enemy.

⁷ “In the greatness of your majesty
you threw down those who opposed you.

You unleashed your burning anger;
it consumed them like stubble.

⁸ By the blast of your nostrils
the waters piled up.

The surging waters stood up like a wall;
the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.

⁹ The enemy boasted,
‘I will pursue, I will overtake them.

I will divide the spoils;
I will gorge myself on them.

I will draw my sword
and my hand will destroy them.’

¹⁰ But you blew with your breath,
and the sea covered them.

They sank like lead

in the mighty waters.
11 Who among the gods
is like you, Lord?
Who is like you—
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?

Prayers of the People:

Gracious and loving Creator, Sometimes the words just are not there. God, you are so amazing that our words and thoughts of how best to praise you pale in comparison to the splendors of your name. You are the Almighty, you are the Redeemer, you are grace never ending and the embodiment of love itself. And when we come to you in prayer, sometimes words fail us in what to say. Yes, we lift up our concerns, and yet sometimes they seem so small in comparison to the tribulations encountered across your creation. How can our problems compare to disasters people face, or the fighting that surrounds people trying to escape, or the horrors that no child should ever experience? Lord God, sometimes when we come to you to pray, we are clueless as to what we should ask for. You know the thoughts in our minds and the desires of our hearts, and there are times when they conflict. Sometimes we want what is not always the best for us, and there are times that we long to hold on to the things we should let go of. There are times when really the best thing we can do is just pray thy will be done. In these moments, dear God, we are so very thankful for the lessons of your Son Jesus Christ for teaching us the words to pray when our own are insufficient, for our tradition teaches that Jesus said to pray to Our Father ...

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 Old Testament 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

Have you ever said, “How can I ever forgive you?” Today, Jesus reminds us that God has forgiven us. Out of love for what our Savior has done for us, we are also to forgive others. Sadly, we forget what Jesus has taught us. Even Peter missed this lesson as well. Jesus gave Peter a lesson on what God requires when it comes to forgiveness. Just as God forgives us, we are to forgive others. So, instead of asking, “How Can I Ever Forgive You?” May we say, “Because God has forgiven me, and because God gives me the strength to do so.”

Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” For Peter to ask this question he must have thought that he was being very generous. The Jewish teaching was that three times were sufficient to forgive. Imagine what Peter must have felt when Jesus told him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven times.” Jesus was telling Peter to forgive your brother every time he sins against you. It does not matter how often he sins against you. Think how many times God has forgiven us for the sins we commit on a daily basis. Think how many times we have disappointed our Heavenly Father when we fail to do what He has commanded us to do. Jesus uses a parable to explain this to Peter and us.

We are told about a king and an unmerciful servant. The king is merciful to his servants just as God is merciful to us because of the sinless life, the innocent death, and the resurrection of Jesus. The king called together his servants in order to settle accounts with them. One of these servants has a debt of 10,000 talents. A debt so large that he can never repay it. One talent was 5000 to 6000 denarii. A day’s wage for the servant is one denarius. The king orders the servant to be put into prison and everything he had to be sold. This included his wife, children, and all that he owned. The servant falls to his knees before the king and begs for forgiveness. The king forgives the unworthy servant his debt knowing that the servant cannot repay it.

This is just like our debt of sin to God is something that we can never pay. Just like the unmerciful servant, our situation is hopeless. Because of our debt of sin, we stand to lose the greatest treasure in the world, eternal life in heaven. We can never pay our debt to God. Our only hope is in the mercy of our gracious and loving God. And God has told us that He freely forgives us all of our sins for Jesus’ sake.

The king showed unlimited mercy to his servant by forgiving the debt just as God has shown his mercy to us. We all stand in the same position before God as that servant stood before his king. We deserve nothing but God’s wrath and

punishment. We stand before God having committed such sins as withholding forgiveness, even contemplating revenge. Or perhaps we haven't put God first. Have we shared His word with others? Do we put God on hold because we are too busy with the worldly things?

Just like the unmerciful servant we plead with God saying, "Lord have mercy!" Like the unmerciful servant who could not meet his king's demands, there is no way we could do anything to meet God's demand. God demands perfect righteousness and holiness from us. Which simply means no sin! Paul tells us in Romans, "The wages of sin is death. Because all of us have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God," the wages we have earned are death and eternal damnation in Hell.

Once we have sinned, there is no way we can undo the sin. There is no way we can possibly meet God's demand. But God who is rich in grace, love and mercy forgives us. Not because of anything that we have done, but because of what our savior Jesus has done for us. Jesus lived the perfect life and suffered an innocent death to pay our debt to God. Because of what Christ has done, our debt to God is totally wiped out. When Christ said on the cross "It is finished" he literally meant "Paid in full."

So, at the command of our Lord, we are to forgive our brother. But it is not always so easy as it may sound. Our sinful nature, seems to find great comfort in holding a grudge. Whoever it may be that you are angry with you must ask yourself. "After all that Jesus has done for me how can I not do the same out of love for my Savior?" We can forgive others because God has forgiven us. We can forgive others because God gives us strength to do so.

Hopefully, we now see and understand that we are to forgive others, because God has forgiven us. However, just like the unmerciful servant we often hold back our forgiveness. After all the king had done for the servant by forgiving his debt when he saw a fellow servant who owed him only 100 denarii he demanded his money. His fellow servant begged for forgiveness, but the unmerciful servant refused and had him thrown in prison until he could pay back all that he owed. The servant forgot what the king had done for him. This was so shocking, the other servants went to tell the king what they had witnessed. The king called the servant back and asked him should he not have shown the same forgiveness to his fellow servant as he was shown. The king then ordered the servant thrown into prison and tortured until he could pay back all that he owed. Jesus tells Peter that this is how God will deal with us if we do not forgive our brother from our heart.

Human nature wants us to believe that we have the right to refuse forgiveness to someone who harms us. It wants us to believe that we can obtain some type of satisfaction by holding a grudge or getting revenge. But this is spiritual poison that condemns us. If we, who are blessed by forgiveness, refuse to forgive others, we are disobeying God's word and are in danger of losing our salvation.

The temptation to withhold our forgiveness is a strong one. But God will never let us be tempted more than we can handle. It is no different with our abilities to forgive others. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

Our God is a loving God. He commands us to forgive our brother, but He also provides strength for us to do so. Our Strength comes from God's love and our Savior words and what he has done for us. Yes, we can draw strength from the cross of Christ. Each time we look at the cross we can see God's love for us. The cross is a symbol of forgiveness, and Christ's love for us enables us to share that forgiveness with others.

Yes, we have the strength to forgive others. A strength that comes from God through the Holy Spirit. We receive this as a gift from God. It is His grace that enables us to forgive and it is His grace that forgives us. It is not the same with God. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, God imparts in us a desire to be forgiving.

In our Lord's prayer we ask our heavenly Father to forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us, so how can we not want to forgive someone? Each Sunday when we pray the Lord's prayer, have we become so numb that we do not think about what we are saying? Any time we feel that we are inclined to withhold our forgiveness this petition of the Lord's Prayer should immediately come to mind.

There will be times in our lives where forgiveness is going to be asked of us. It may be from our Christian brother or from an unbeliever. The way we respond will show that individual whether or not we practice what we preach. We forgive all people because God has forgiven us. We forgive all people because God strengthens us. May we constantly remember the gift of forgiveness that God has given us in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so that whenever we are faced with the temptation of withholding forgiveness, we can say, "I have been forgiven, I will also forgive you." Amen.

Benediction:

Followers of Christ, go now in the blessing and assurance that you are a forgiven people empowered by grace to forgive and heal the divisions that keep us from truly loving God, self, neighbor, and all creation with the fullness of our beings. Amen.