

The Lutheran Church of the Covenant
“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”



Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 13, 2020

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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.

Prelude *Just As I Am* (VOGT)

Confession & Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as we take time to recognize our shortcomings, while also remembering God's relentless grace.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation.

Amen!

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.**

**We place our hope in ourselves
and rely on our own efforts.**

We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.

We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.

**We fear difference and do not welcome others
as you have welcomed us.**

We sin in thought, word, and deed.

By your grace, forgive us;

through your love, renew us;

and, as the Holy Spirit, lead us;

so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen!

Beloved of God,

by the radical abundance of divine mercy
 we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus,
 through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.
 Our sins are forgiven.
 Let us live now in hope.
 For hope does not disappoint,
 because God's love has been poured into our hearts
 through the Holy Spirit.
Amen!

Gathering Hymn *I Come with Joy*

#482



1 I come with joy, a child of God, for - giv - en, loved, and
 2 I come with Chris - tians far and near to find, as all are
 3 As Christ breaks bread, and bids us share, each proud di - vi - sion
 4 The Spir - it of the ris - en Christ, un - seen, but ev - er
 5 To - geth - er met, to - geth - er bound by all that God has



free, the life of Je - sus to re - call in
 fed, the new com - mu - ni - ty of love in
 ends. The love that made us, makes us one, and
 near, is in such friend - ship bet - ter known, a -
 done, we'll go with joy, to give the world the



love laid down for me, in love laid down for me.
 Christ's com - mu - nion bread, in Christ's com - mu - nion bread.
 strang - ers now are friends, and strang - ers now are friends.
 live a - mong us here, a - live a - mong us here.
 love that makes us one, the love that makes us one.

Text: Brian A. Wren, b. 1936

Music: DOVE OF PEACE, W. Walker, *Southern Harmony*, 1835

Text © 1971, rev. 1995 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

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!**

First Lesson

Genesis 50:15-21

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.

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.

The word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God!

Psalm

Psalm 103:8-13

⁸Lord, 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.**

¹⁰You 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.**

¹²As 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 Lesson

Romans 14:1-12

This 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.

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.

The word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God!

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

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.”

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord!

Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon



1 Just as I am, with - out one plea, but that thy blood was
2 Just as I am, though tossed a - bout with man - y_a con - flict,
3 Just as I am, thou wilt re - ceive, wilt wel - come, par - don,
4 Just as I am; thy love un - known has bro - ken ev - 'ry



shed for me, and that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
man - y_a doubt, fight - ings and fears with - in, with - out,
cleanse, re - lieve; be - cause thy prom - ise I be - lieve,
bar - rier down; now to be thine, yea, thine a - lone,



O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Text: Charlotte Elliott, 1789–1871
Music: WOODWORTH, William B. Bradbury, 1816–1868

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, responding to each petition with the words “receive our prayer.”

God of open arms, make all your precious children into signs of your gracious welcome, whether meeting physically or digitally. Strengthen faith through new ventures for education and growth. Bless all leaders of faith communities for their work in this unprecedented time. O God, you are full of compassion; **receive our prayer.**

God of lands and seas, continue your care for your entire creation. Where human selfishness has brought ruin and destruction, we ask you to heal and renew your earth. Preserve the lands from fire and storm. Protect the sources of food that your creatures need for life. O God, you are full of compassion; **receive our prayer.**

God of justice, lead the nations away from the ways of violence. Guide all organizations that seek reconciliation across national borders. Show families, neighborhoods, and nations how to welcome diversity while sharing common ground. O God, you are full of compassion; **receive our prayer.**

God of the sufferers, visit prisons and care homes with health and hope. Free victims of human trafficking and forced labor. Deliver all who are bound by debt. Feed all who hunger and provide safety to migrants. Protect firefighters and first responders. Heal the sick. O God, you are full of compassion; **receive our prayer.**

Whether we live or whether we die, we are yours. We thank you for those who have led us in the faith. Hold us with them in your everlasting love. O God, you are full of compassion; **receive our prayer.**

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

Thanksgiving at the Table

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts!

We lift them to the Lord!

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God!

It is right to give our thanks and praise!

Holy God,
our Maker, Redeemer, and Healer,
in the harmonious world of your creation,
the plants and animals,
the seas and stars
were whole and well in your praise.

When sin had scarred the world,
you sent your Son to heal our ills
and to form us again into one.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this for the remembrance of me.
Remembering, therefore,
his acts of healing,
his body given up,
and his victory over death,
we await that day when all the peoples of the earth
will come to the river to enjoy the tree of life.
Holy Spirit, be immersed in this meal:

as grains scattered on the hillside become one bread,
so let your church be gathered from the ends of the earth,
that all may be fed with the Bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Through him all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit,
both now and forever.

Amen!

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Communion

Music Interlude *Meditation for Solo Flute* (MALKEVITCH)

(please use this time to meditate or pray for those dear to your heart)

Prayer after Communion

God of the welcome table,
in this meal we have feasted on your goodness
and have been united by your presence among us.
Empower us to go forth sustained by these gifts
so that we may share your neighborly love with all,
through Jesus Christ, the giver of abundant life.

Amen!

Blessing

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
 nor things present, nor things to come,
 nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
 will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, † Jesus, the Christ,
 and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
 bless you and keep you in eternal love. **Amen!**

Sending Hymn *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*

#834



1 Im - mor - tal, in - vis - i - ble, God on - ly wise,
 2 Un - rest - ing, un - hast - ing, and si - lent as light,
 3 To all, life thou giv - est, to both great and small;
 4 Thou reign - est in glo - ry; thou dwell - est in light;



in light in - ac - ces - si - ble hid from our eyes,
 nor want - ing, nor wast - ing, thou rul - est in might;
 in all life thou liv - est, the true life of all;
 thine an - gels a - dore thee, all veil - ing their sight;



most bless - ed, most glo - rious, the An - cient of Days,
 thy jus - tice like moun - tains high soar - ing a - bove
 we blos - som and flour - ish like leaves on the tree,
 all laud we would ren - der; oh, help us to see



al - might - y, vic - to - rious, thy great name we praise!
 thy clouds which are foun - tains of good - ness and love.
 and with - er and per - ish, but naught chang - eth thee.
 'tis on - ly the splen - dor of light hid - eth thee!

Text: Walter Chalmers Smith, 1824–1908, alt.
 Music: ST. DENIO, Welsh traditional

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with you!

Thanks be to God!

Postlude *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise* (HAYES)

Praying Together

... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating: Gayle Agg, Bob Buettner, Alexis Carr, Joan Clarke, Steve Dobush, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Nealie Gage, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Alex Hohenstein, Judy Jones, Tom Juhasz, Ralph Kane, Dylan King, Jason Lanese, Andrea Lanzalaca, Sara Mendes, Phyllis Nemeth, Bernice Novak, Don Rusher Jr., Norm Schuette, Arlene Stoltz, Marie Storms, Tim Susanek, Tom Susanek, Phyllis Treichel, Phyllis Welker, Linda Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family

LAST WEEK

General Fund receipts for week ending 9/6/2020: \$2892

To the glory of God, and in loving memory of George Lautanen, memorial offerings were given by Bishop & Linda Allende, Paula & Alex Hohenstein, and the Lautenan family.

Lectionary Blog: Love Conquers Sin (Part 2)



Last week we discussed Jesus' teaching on loving folks who hurt other people. The community was to confront them repeatedly until they stopped sinning and repented. This week, Jesus turns to the behavior and responsibilities of the victims. I think it's especially important for us, as the body of Christ in this world, to pay attention to what Jesus does and does not ask of righteous victims.

First, it's important to reiterate that in Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus is calling his followers to love perpetrators of sin by confronting people with the way that their/our sins harm others. This isn't a one-time action that dissolves our responsibility toward hurtful people, but ever-widening portions of the community are to confront the person to help her or him stop hurting others—for their own good. In the context of this week's discussion of forgiving sin, we must therefore be clear that forgiveness is *not* about excusing sin or permitting harmful "I" behavior to continue. Christian responsibility toward perpetrators who hurt others is to lovingly, repeatedly call them/us to repentance, just like Jesus did with tax collectors and sinners. What, then, is the responsibility of victims of others' sins?

Peter was understandably confused when Jesus extended the responsibility to love our neighbors by pursuing them to stop and repent of behaviors that harmed others. He then asked Jesus how many times he was required to forgive someone. Jesus had already said that his followers should attempt to stop someone from sinning against others at least three times—though I argue that Jesus spent his entire life doing this, and so should we. Peter asked if forgiving someone seven times was enough— more than double the number of times Jesus had just said to confront a perpetrator. Jesus told him that forgiveness must be infinite, or at least 490 times.

But what is forgiveness? Jesus then told a parable of the kingdom to answer the question. A king sought to collect what his slaves owed him. One slave owed over 150,000 years' worth of work, so the king demanded that he and his family be sold to pay the debt. When the slave pitifully asked for patience to repay a debt he never could, the king felt compassion and completely canceled the massive debt. That same slave then went out and found someone who owed him 100 days' worth of work. Instead of being compassionate, the slave choked the man and threw him in prison. This got around to the king, who had the original slave tortured until his debt was paid. To make sure we get his point, Jesus says God will do this if we don't forgive from our hearts.

Emotionally, this is a difficult parable because we don't want to ask anything of victims. Yet, I think the parable is essential for two reasons. First, it helps us understand what is, and what isn't, forgiveness. I don't think the king, even after being compassionate to the slave, would ever loan him money again or trust him with anything. Forgiveness is by no means pretending that the offense didn't occur or trusting the perpetrator with any responsibility that he has demonstrated that he doesn't deserve. Forgiveness also isn't declaring someone innocent when they aren't. Forgiveness, as explained by the parable, is giving up pursuing what we are owed by those who have hurt us.

If either of the debtors attempted to repay their debts, I think that would have been welcomed in the parable. In the section we read last week, Jesus calls for the community to continually pressure the offender to repent—that is, to undo the effects of sin, to make restitution. But the forgiveness that Jesus calls us to is to stop seeking that which we are owed by those who have hurt us. Renouncing the debt that is owed is what Joseph does in this week’s reading (Genesis 50:21) and what Paul counsels in 1 Corinthians 6:6-7. This is why Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

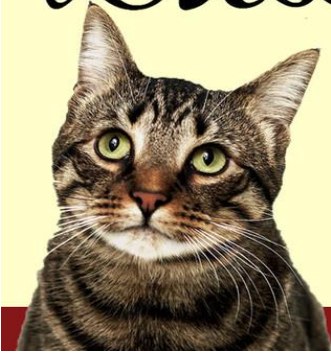
Ceasing pursuit of what we are owed by those who have sinned against us doesn’t absolve the perpetrator of his responsibility to still try to make restitution. But it does free us from waiting on another for our healing. Forgiving is saying that God is sufficient for us. This is the second gift of this difficult parable. It helps concretize one aspect of God’s love. God foregoes restitution for all our sins. Repenting is still good—and I would say essential—in order to try healing the ways we hurt God and others. But God doesn’t need us to do that. This is our Christian response to human sin: as a community, we love the sinner by helping her or him stop hurting other people and work toward restitution. We love the victim by helping her or him let go of the restitution that she or he is owed.



Cory Driver is a minister of word and service, and the director of the Transformational Leadership Academy in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. He earned his doctorate in Jewish religious cultures from Emory University, Atlanta. Cory lives with his family in Indianapolis.

This, and other resources for the journey of faith, are available at LivingLutheran.org as well as our own Covenant website, covenantmaplehts.org.

Blessing of the Animals



On Sunday, October 4, during our 9am worship, we will include a time for a Blessing of the Animals. We still anticipate worshipping from our back parking lot, so we encourage you to bring your pets along that day. You may keep them in your vehicle with you or bring them outside to be beside you. You will not be asked to bring them forward for an individual blessing, but the blessing that is given will be so for all our cherished animals who will be with us that day. We do so this day in recognition of St. Francis of Assisi, whose feast day is October 4, and is claimed as the patron saint of animals and the environment.

Romans

Chapter 14



ABOVE
BEFORE
CONFESS
DOUBTFUL
FALLETH
HIMSELF
JUDGMENT
MIGHT
PERSUADED
REVIVED
STUMBLINGBLOCK
TONGUE

ACCOUNT
BELIEVETH
DESPISE
EATETH
FULLY
HOLDEN
LIVETH
NOTHING
RATHER
SAITH
THANKS
UNCLEAN

ALIKE
BROTHER
DIETH
ESTEEMETH
GIVETH
JESUS
LIVING
NOUGHT
RECEIVE
SERVANT
THEREFORE
WHETHER

ANOTHER
CHRIST
DISPUTATIONS
FAITH
HERBS
JUDGE
MASTER
OCCASION
REGARDETH
STANDETH
THINGS
WRITTEN