**MODIFIED SERVICE- 15TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST- September 13, 2020**

**ZION EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH, PHLIPSBURG**

Welcome to everyone on this 15th Sunday of Pentecost, where we continue to gather safely from the comfort of our homes as a reminder of our love for one another.

The weather is turning cooler, fall is on the way. We have had lots of ran this past week, which Greg and I are thankful for, as we planted some grass around our septic system, and it is coming up beautifully!

The worship committee will be meeting this week to plan our worship services when we return on October 11, Thanksgiving Sunday.

Please keep Murray and Donna Ziegler in your prayers as they mourn the passing of Murray’s brother Gerry “Hatz” Ziegler who died last Sunday. The funeral was this past Thursday.

Our GotoMeeting Coffee hour meets at 11:00, please join us!

Please remember that Zion relies on your continued support each week to meet our monthly expenses. Thank you to all who support and pray for our congregation.

**GATHERING**

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

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Faithful God, **have mercy on us.** **We confess that we are captive to sin** **and cannot free ourselves.** **We turn from your loving embrace** **and go our own ways.** **We pass judgment on one another** **before examining ourselves.** **We place our own needs before those of our neighbors.** **We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves.**

**Make us humble, cast away our transgressions,** **and turn us again to life in you**

**through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection,

Christ has made us his own.

Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of ☩ Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God’s work in the world. **Amen.**

**GREETING**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

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.**

**OPENING HYMN- Immortal Invisible, God Only Wise- ELW 834**1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise!  
  
2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;  
thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.  
  
3 To all, life thou givest, to both great and small;  
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;  
we blossom and flourish like leaves on the tree,  
and wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.  
  
4 Thou reignest in glory; thou dwellest in light;  
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;  
all laud we would render; oh, help us to see  
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee!

**WORD**

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

**FIRST READING: Genesis 50:15-21**

A reading from Genesis.

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.

**PSALM: Psalm 103:[1-7] 8-13**

1Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God’s holy name.  
2Bless the Lord,  O my soul, and forget not all God’s benefits—  
3who forgives  all your sins and heals all  your diseases;  
4who redeems your life from the grave and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy;   
5who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed  like an eagle’s.  
6O Lord, you provide vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.  
7You made known your ways to Moses and your works to the children of Israel.  
8Lord, you are full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love;   
9you 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.  
11For 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.  
13As a father has compassion for his children, so you have compassion for those who fear you, O Lord.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 18:21-35**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

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.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**SERMON**

Forgiveness, such an easy word to say but a hard action for many of us to do, myself included. We repeat the Lord’s Prayer every week stating “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, but do we honestly and faithfully forgive one another? In our pre-Covid world, we used to share the peace with one another every week. Now while it has become more of a greeting as of late, the sharing of the peace was originally a time where folks were to reconcile with one another, with someone who had hurt them or done them wrong. The handshake and looking one another in the eye, was an actual act of forgiveness. Are we really able to truly forgive others in the way that we have been forgiven by God through the life, death, and resurrection of God’s only Son Jesus Christ? These are but a few of the questions and discussions I had in my head this week as I was preparing today’s sermon.

Peter asks another thought-provoking question in our gospel reading this morning. He asks Jesus, “How often should one forgive a member of the church if one is wronged by them…would 7 times be enough?” Now I am not sure why Peter came up with the number 7, 7 is used a lot in the Bible and it was known as the perfect number. Jesus’ response is that he should forgive 77 times, more than 10 times what Peter originally thought or depending on which version of the bible one reads it is 70 times 7…an even larger amount!

Jesus then goes on to tell a parable and again Jesus uses hyperbole and rhetoric to explain forgiveness to Peter, because as I have stated so many times in the past, Jesus likes to turn everyone’s world upside-down using exaggeration and far-fetched stories. The parable goes like this, there was a king who had many servants and one of the servants owed the king a large amount of money, and when I say large that does not even begin to cover the amount of money that the servant owed. He owed the king 10,000 talents. Let me explain some numbers so that we are better able to understand. A talent was 6000 denarii. A denarii was what a servant would typically earn in one day. So, if you figure it out, the servant owed the king some 60 million denarii, or 60 million days worth of wages. That is an incredible amount of money for someone to owe another person, it is an amount that could never be paid back! The king is at first shrewd saying that the servant, his family, and all the servant’s possessions would have to be sold, separating them from one another. But the servant begs him not to do so, and the king agrees. He forgives the man and forgives his debt. If this were the end of the story we would have a great sense of the understanding of forgiveness, right? The king forgave the servant, life was good for all….

But that was not the end of the parable, that same servant then met up with another servant and remembered that he owed him some money; 100 denarii, (a much more realistic amount of money to owe someone, a small amount of mercy in comparison). The servant begs for some time to repay the debt, but the first servant would not allow it, he would not forgive him. In fact, he clutches the man’s throat and demands that he be repaid his debt. Now we do not know all the story, but the servant seems to have forgotten how he was forgiven by the king just a short while ago….

Forgiveness is hard, especially when we have been hurt or betrayed by someone we care about or love, by a family member or friend. The wounds of the action or words hurt, and the pain runs deep and even though we may want to forgive the pain, the anger, the pride, the hurt, or the guilt make it difficult too do so. These feelings can consume a soul.

But when we reflect on forgiveness we can understand that forgiveness is not done for the other person, we forgive to allow ourselves to move on in our lives, to move on from the past, to live in the present as children of God. There are many things that forgiveness is not. Kathryn Schifferdecker states that “forgiveness is not license for continued injustice, abuse, or oppression. An unrepentant sinner (or an unjust system) cannot be allowed to continue to harm others…..Forgiveness does not erase consequences… Forgiveness may heal a relationship, but it does not erase all the consequences of sin.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Forgiveness can be freeing for both the one who is forgiven and the one who forgives. Forgiveness opens the door to rebuilding relationships and offers a new way forward in our world. Forgiveness is life-giving.

So how many times should we forgive….7, 77, 777? Is there any true number of times that we should forgive someone? What if someone does that one last thing that is just too much? What Jesus was trying to tell Peter in the telling of the hyperbole and rhetoric of the parable is that forgiveness is too great to be calculated. Forgiveness allows our hearts, minds, and souls to return to God. We know that even in our sin, God is working through us, we are loved, and we are forgiven. Just as Joseph forgave his brothers in our first reading this morning. We are also reminded of the glory and grace of the forgiveness and love of God in our psalm this morning, knowing that “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger for ever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him” (Ps 103:8-11).

Peter will come to understand the importance of forgiveness, grace, and mercy. Peter is imperfect and we know that as the rooster crows, Peter will deny Jesus 3 times and he is no where to be found when Jesus is crucified on the cross. Judas will betray Jesus. Jesus knows of the betrayal and abandonment, but he still lifts the cup at the last supper and proclaims “this is the blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28). Forgiveness is life-giving, it is the unconditional love of God.

I urge you this week to think about forgiveness. Who are you holding a grudge against, who has hurt you, who have you hurt? Forgiveness is hard. But know that we are all imperfect beings who sin, we make mistakes, we say words in anger that we then regret. But through it all we are loved, we have been given the gift of forgiveness in our past, we will be forgiven today, and we will be forgiven tomorrow because of God’s unconditional love for us. So, let us go forth in the world extending forgiveness, extending grace, and extending love to all. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY- Where Charity and Love Prevail- ELW 359**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lI1mRVlLCE**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lI1mRVlLCE)

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Though we pray separately in our homes, we are united in the Spirit. 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 and acceptance for all. Strengthen our faith through learning and serving in your name and nurture new ministries. 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. We remember all who are living with the threat of forest fires, climate fires and wildfires in Canada and the United States.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 and hate. 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.**

Wrap your loving arms around all who are sick and injured, and all who grieve and mourn, especiallyEddie, Elaine, Susie, Ruth, Mary Ann, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Carol, Bill, Janet, Eileen, Hudson, Murray and Donna Ziegler, and those we name in the silence of our hearts.Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Watch over our children and educators as they continue return to in-person classes this week. Calm the fears of parents and bring wisdom and guidance to teachers and staff. Keep students safe and healthy as they engage in new learning and as they reunite with friends and classmates. 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.**

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

**Amen.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

Let us pray,

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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.**

**BLESSING**

Mothering God, Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life.

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Remember the poor.

**Thanks be to God.**

**SENDING HYMN- Go My Children With My Blessing- ELW 543**

1 "Go, my children, with my blessing, never alone.  
Waking, sleeping, I am with you, you are my own.  
In my love's baptismal river I have made you mine forever.  
Go, my children, with my blessing, you are my own."

2 "Go, my children, sins forgiven, at peace and pure.  
Here you learned how much I love you, what I can cure.  
Here you heard my dear Son's story,  
here you touched him, saw his glory.  
Go, my children, sins forgiven, at peace and pure."  
  
3 "Go, my children, fed and nourished, closer to me.  
Grow in love and love by serving, joyful and free.  
Here my Spirit's power filled you, here my tender comfort stilled you.  
Go, my children, fed and nourished, joyful and free."

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1. Kathryn Schifferdecker, “Forgiveness is at the Core” in *Craft of Preaching* from Working Preacher, accessed September 11, 2020, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5454>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)