

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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**Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 17, 2023
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight**

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.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əŋəm (Musqueam) and Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We enter this house, gathered to worship our God who is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. For God's anger does not last forever, nor are we dealt with according to our sin. Rather, God's love is as great as the heavens are high above the earth, and has removed our transgression from us as far as the east is from the west. Let us praise our God, whose compassion for us is everlasting. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: Let Us Go Now to the Banquet (#523)

GREETING

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

And also with you.

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 185)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, you are the source of our salvation and you have made us and redeemed us by your love. May your compassion bear fruit in us and strengthen us to reflect your grace and mercy out to all the world, that all people might embrace the joy of your community and fellowship through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Genesis 50:15-21

A reading from Genesis.

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 READING: Romans 14:1-12

A reading from Romans.

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.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

GOSPEL: Matthew 18:21-35

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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."

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

O Lord of all, open our understanding to your Word, that we might hear you calling, see you leading, and feel your healing in our community and in our lives, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Forgiveness is hard, isn't it? Well, maybe it's more fair to say that it's actually hard for everyone else. For us it's easy. Many of us were raised in the church so we know all about forgiveness and we forgive when we can. We know it's a good thing and have been doing it for a while, so we're actually pretty good at it if we do say so ourselves. We're so good at forgiving in fact, that we laugh at Peter's question thinking that we only need to forgive 7 times. I mean, I'm sure that many of us probably forgive more times than that in a day or two, a week tops.

So Jesus' response to Peter's seemingly misguided question doesn't really surprise us. When Jesus is like, no not seven, more like seventy-seven times or seventy times seven or whatever astronomical number was invented back then, we'd be like, "yeah, and?" We'd be completely unphased by it because it's just what we do. We live in Canada after all, we're used to people saying sorry.

But while we're sitting up in our pompous forgiveness thrones, a close look at the text changes everything. Or at least, it changed for me when I read it this time around. I can't believe I never noticed it before, or maybe I did notice but forgot, which I also find hard to believe. Anyway, when Peter asks this seemingly stupid question, his recorded words are, "when a member of the church sins against me." A member. Like, he's asking Jesus how many times he should forgive the *same person*.

Right?? This whole time I always thought it was how many times total he should forgive. Now that sounds ludicrous. But now seeing that he's talking one person, just this one person who keeps messing things up, this one person who just never seems to be able to learn their lesson. How many times do we forgive this kind of person?

All of a sudden, this question got a whole lot harder, because in general we as a species aren't exactly the most patient bunch. As we've established, we could totally forgive multiple people once or twice, but the same person? More than seven times? I don't know.

I mean, we have sayings out there, “fool me once shame on you, fool me twice then shame on me” and “everyone deserves a second chance, but not for the same mistake.” This tells me that people in general really do have a limit to how many times they can forgive the same person. Because let’s be honest, it’s annoying when people keep doing the same thing against us over and over. It’s irritating when they just don’t get how to *not* be bad to us. It’s infuriating when they can’t seem to be able to get something so simple right. Something so simple like just stop being a jerk, for goodness sake.

I’m sure you all have people like this in our lives. I personally can think of 3 little ones that constantly get on my nerves... wait make that 4 little ones. Seriously though, just off the top of my head I can think of like 2 or 3 people that I’ve actively cut out of my life because of the constant wrongdoing and my own inability to tolerate their incompetence. No one from here though, so don’t you worry about that.

Just last month I was dealing with a major tech company trying to set up a new service, and you’d think this kind of thing would just be a phone call, a contract to sign, and wait for the service to start. But no, with them it was mistake after mistake, miscommunication after miscommunication, and total blunder after total blunder, all on their part by the way. It was such a drawn out headache that after a month of back and forth and finally getting the service up and running, they ended up charging me way more than the quoted price. That was just the last straw for me and I ended up cancelling it all and going back with my former provider. It was so bad that my wife actually said, “never again with them... never again.”

And so Jesus says that I should forgive them for the last month of headache? I should forgive those people that I’ve had to cut out of my life for their screw ups? I should forgive those that have totally used up all of my patience? How can we do that? How can we look past all the frustrations brought out by these people that don’t get it, the anger we feel due to their actions that are actively against us, and the hurt that comes from these bad interactions? Knowing that some people never learn, having that proven to us again and again to the point that just have lost all credibility whatsoever, how can we give them that second, third, or 77th chance? With all the frustrations we can have with the conflict and friction with those whom we don’t like, where can we find the strength to love them enough to see how they are just as fallible, just as human, just as in need of forgiveness as us?

Because really, deep down, that is what it is all about. Our inability to forgive is linked to our inability to see the humanity in those that wronged us, our inability to recognise the value that we all share as God’s people, our inability to see others as just as fallen... *and forgiven* as we are. And when we don’t equate others with ourselves, we automatically think that it’s somehow up to us to determine who deserves what.

That’s what the parable that Jesus gives is all about, isn’t it? We know the story, the slave owes the king like a bajillion dollars, but out of compassion the king forgives the entire debt. But then that same slave goes and turns around and threatens someone who owes him like a Keg dinner or something to better pay him back or else. The king catches wind of it and out of anger, imprisons the original slave until he pays back the initial debt.

A lot of people might think this means that we have to forgive or else God won’t forgive us, and I admit at first glance it really seems that way. But as I look at it closer I just can’t agree with that for one big reason: this whole parable makes like no sense. Everything is clearly

exaggerated and blown out of proportion so I don't know if we can make such clear parallels like that.

Instead, it seems to me that the point of this parable is not to fear us into a forgiving spirit, but it's to explain to us just how hard forgiveness is, no matter the size of what is being forgiven. The parable is showing us that our role in forgiving others starts with recognizing how we've been forgiven first. I think the big lesson that Jesus is giving here is that learning and having the strength to forgive is just as much for our benefit as it is for the other.

Because when we forgive, we are humbled, we see God in the other, and we recognise how we are God's dearly beloved along with all the saints of light. In forgiveness we are brought a step closer to community, relationship, and God's kingdom. Because of forgiveness, God's love is made to be more apparent in and around our lives, and empowers us to heed God's call to love and serve.

Still, I know, it isn't easy. In fact, it continues to be extremely hard. But by God's grace we are made strong, given resolve, and led to see God's love for all people in all its glory. We are reminded of how we are all given value and worth and it isn't up to us who deserves what. And as we forgive just as we've been forgiven, we continually grow in our faith and acceptance of who we are and whose we are, allowing us the peace that surpasses all understanding.

This isn't to force us into forgiving others. It's not about guiltting us into being better people. It isn't even about threatening us that we'll lose our place in God's family and kingdom unless we forgive others. But this whole forgiveness thing is designed to help us to see how much we are loved, how much value we are given, and how, although we mess up from time to time, we are constantly welcomed into God's arms of grace and mercy. And as we see that, we see that in others as well, humbling us into community and relationship and recognition of God's presence with all of us for all time. It is then the hope that we can forgive the same person 77 or more times, because we have been forgiven eternally by the God who created the universe.

So in this season after Pentecost, may we see the value in forgiveness not just for other but also for us, that we might continue to grow as God's people in God's kingdom, empowered by God's love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (#588)

CREED

Together with all of God's people, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's 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

Called into gracious community with one another, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Lord, in your compassionate mercy," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, in your compassionate mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, your steadfast love speaks to us and empowers us to treat each other with grace. May your forgiveness for us all be apparent to all through our actions, our ministry, and our lives, that all would be able to see your truth in who we are and what we do. We remember in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those who use our building for worship and work; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops, pastors, and ministries of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for out of our own BC Synod: St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Prince Rupert and their pastor Diana Edis; and Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Richmond and their pastor Christoph Reiners. Lord, in your compassionate mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, we admit that we have not been great stewards of all that you have made, but you continue to bless us and entrust us with your creation. May the beauty and wonder of this planet be restored, and may we always appreciate it as our home. Lord, in your compassionate mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you do not deal with us according to our sins, but you treat us with a grace and love that lasts forever. May this grace be reflected in our nations and to our nations, that we might all learn to live in peace and harmony. We pray especially for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. Lord, in your compassionate mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, your steadfast love is great and you remove our transgressions from us, and you bring us into healing and wholeness. Be with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that we never lose sight of the grace that you show us all. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Minkeo; Beulah; Bev and family; Sukhwant; John; Cari; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; William; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Allen; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
Lord, in your compassionate mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you have compassion for all of us, and you welcome us into your forgiveness and eternal life with you and all the saints. May the lives of faith from the past always serve as inspiration for our lives of faith in the present, that we might in turn inspire the lives of faith in the future. Lord, in your compassionate mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the steadfast love and grace shown to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE

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.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ;
who reminds us of your forgiving and gracious salvation that welcomes us in
with the choirs of angels,
the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth
in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy and almighty God, you are our rock and shield and in you we shall not fear. For you save us by your grace and mercy, and join us together as your people. And when the time was right, you sent to us Jesus to be your Word made flesh, serving as an example to all of community and right relationship.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took the bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it saying, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took their common cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them to drink from 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."

For it is in this bread and cup that we are reminded, O God, of your steadfast love and mercy, joining us as a community of believers, together proclaiming this basis of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

So it is to you, Lord of hosts, that all honour and glory belong, for you are merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, welcoming us all into your kingdom forever,

through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one by God's steadfast love, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Take and eat, God's grace and mercy welcomes us all.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 191)

Just As I Am, without One Plea (#592)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we again give you thanks for feeding us and nourishing us with your Word and truth, redeeming us by your steadfast love and grace. Be with us as we depart from this place, reflecting your love and mercy onto all those that we meet, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

Now may the blessing from our Shepherd God be with you,
the love of our Saviour God fill you,
and the power found in the Spirit of God sustain you,
now and always.

Amen.

SENDING SONG: Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer (#618)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, practice forgiveness and live the gospel.

Thanks be to God.