

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 13, 2020 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Fifteenth Sunday of Pentecost

Senior Pastor	Alan Kethan	<u>Home:</u> (979)-942-9060	<u>Cell:</u> (830)-708-1200
Deacon of Word and Service			Sandye Fletcher
Youth & Family Specialist			Stephanie Polasek
Music Minister			Robert Eaton
Congregational Chair			Curtiss Schonenberg
Creative Child Care Interim Director			Briana Bedford
Creative Child Care Executive Administrator			Courtney Busselman
Secretary			Elena Holub
Custodian			O. C. S.
Parish Nurse Program Coordinator			DyAnn Lauzon

MISSION STATEMENT: Love God, Love Neighbor

VISION STATEMENT: Showing our love of God and neighbor, we will work to double the number of members that are serving as well as those that are being served from 2018 to 2021.

- *As we enter into a sacred time and space, a friendly reminder to please set your cell phone to vibrate.*
- ***We want to welcome all of our guests today and thank you for worshipping with us. If you have any questions or would like more information regarding our services, programs, day care, or preschool programs at St. Paul, please visit our Welcome Center in the narthex immediately following our service, and an attendant will be more than happy to assist you. If this is your first time at St. Paul, we hope you will take a gift along with you. We also have a gift bag for children.***

* **This symbol indicates that the congregation is invited to stand physically or in spirit.**

INTRODUCTION

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.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

* **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

P As we have gathered to worship, we call on God's Spirit to help us recognize and confess our sins. Those places in our hearts, minds and actions, where we have fallen short of how God wants us to be, we confess. In this brief time of silence we privately ask God for forgiveness and help to be better.

Brief moment of silence.

P 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.

C Amen.

GOSPEL SONG: THEY'LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord. We are one in the Spirit
We are one in the Lord; and we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

CHORUS:

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.

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GOSPEL: Matthew 18:21-35

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

A The holy gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 18, verses 21-35.

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.”

GOSPEL SONG: THEY'LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand.
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand;
And together, we'll spread the news that God is in our land.

CHORUS:

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
We will work with each other, we will work side by side;
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride. **CHORUS**

All praise to the Father, from whom all things come, and all praise to Christ
Jesus, His only son; And all praise to the Spirit who makes us one. **CHORUS**

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SERMON “The Incredible Power of Forgiveness” Rev. Dr. Brian K. Gige

* **SERMON SONG: NO MATTER WHAT**

A lot of us grew up believing; at any moment we could lose it all,
And at the drop of a hat, God might turn His back and move on.
A lot of us feel like we blew it; thinkin’ that we’re just too far gone,
But I want you to know, there’s still a hope for you now.

CHORUS 1:

*No matter what you’ve done, you can’t erase His love.
Nothing can change it, you’re not separated, no matter what.*

There’s never been a better time to get honest.
There’s never been a better time to get clean.
So come as you are; run to the cross and be free (oh, be free).

CHORUS 2:

*No matter what you’ve done, you can’t erase His love.
Nothing can change it, you’re not separated.
No matter where you run, He’s always holding on.
You’re still a daughter, you’re still a son, no matter what.*

BRIDGE:

Don’t know what you’ve been taught, don’t know what you’ve been told.
All I know is my God will never let go of you, no.
I don’t know what you’ve seen, don’t know what you’ve been through,
All I know is my God will never let go of you,
He’ll never let go – o – o He’ll never never never let you go...

REPEAT CHORUS 2

END:

You’re still a daughter, you’re still a son... no matter what.

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* **APOSTLES' CREED**

A With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

C 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.

(The congregation may be seated during the prayers.)

PRAYERS

A Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

A 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.

A brief silence.

A Make your ways known to the nations. Speak kindness to our bitter grudges. Settle our hearts when we want to settle accounts with violence. Bless our leaders with patience and wisdom.

A brief silence.

A Teach us to forgive.

A brief silence.

A We pray for the families and friends of Michael & Mazie Hess and Joe Blackburn as well as Verline Schroeter, Courtney Busselman's grandmother, who passed away this past week. Be with them and comfort them during this difficult time.

A brief silence.

A We pray for those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:

Michael Maas; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you.

A brief silence.

A We pray those battling cancer that they may know healing and comfort. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*

Charlie Hanks; Tim Dahlstrom; Gracie Brune; Margaret Rogers; Leonard Kahlden; Curtis Wallin; Harvey Skow; Megan Burch; Jennifer Aleman; Lisa Grazier; Phyllis Behrend; Bill Stolle; Jamie Stokes; Jessica Mauchlen; Larry Guthrie; Donna Tiner; Libby Divin; Tina Barten; Anthony Baumbach; Bill Brayton; Cindy Masek; Noël Paden; Weston Swoboda; Denver Meyer; Diane Brooks; Bob Loy; Joe Hluchanek; Devon Tiffin; Stanley King; Monty Gillett; Dawn Foster; Amber Smith; Edward Halcolm; Alison Randazzo; Amber Kutach; Louis Camacho; Melvin Schobel; Janet Greene; Karen Teal; Sabrina Galindo; Debbie Grimes; Horst Traub; Margie Fisk; Preston Carter; Penny Miller; Carl Hahn; James Stock; Megan Cain; Bob Rutta; Ernest Moore; Amanda Fuchs; Cyndi Wallace; Karen Broussard; Donna Young; Sharon Heimann; and Brenda Baker.

A We pray for all expectant mothers that they have healthy terms and deliveries, and if not, may they find comfort and peace. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*

Kimberly Grazier; April Poncik; Heather Pavlicek Frieda; Alexis Templeton; and Angela Koranek.

A We pray for those who reside in care facilities and the homebound that they receive your caring and compassion. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*

Dolores Wessels; Alma Larmer; Doris Poppe; Bill Rodgers; Barbara McMath; Linda Munos Rodgers; Coy Dell Schindler; R. O. (Reuben) Barten; Mabel Krenek; Judy Brisco; Barbara Prause; Lou Cordes; Madeline Menke; Adeline Spross; Doris Horndt; Robert Little; Elsie Ashorn; Helen Perrard; Delores Purcell; Curtis Berger; Marjorie Brune; Dolores Hoelscher;

Jesse Grabow; Beatrice Zikuhr; Robert Eaton; James Booker; Deanna Lee; Don Morrison; Adrian Fritsch; and Sylvia Marburger.

A We pray for all law enforcement officers, fire fighters, first responders, 9-1-1 dispatchers and active duty military members that they are protected and kept safe. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*

Law enforcement officers: Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Marley Mayo; Johnny Kovar; Abigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Andrew Lattimore; Luke Kanz; Bruno Flores; Jessica Dimas; Zane Weido; as well as Donnie Templeton and Jason Templeton who are also fire fighters. For all fire fighters, first responders and 9-1-1 dispatchers, especially Brent Gorman, Sr.; Brent Gorman, Jr.; Reid Brasher; Dusty Dittmar; John Maertz; Ron Luedke; Randy Neuendorff; Pastor Alan Kethan; Kristi Weyand; Eric Weyand; Bradley Berger; Jon Berger; James Chollett; Edward Thraen, Jr.; Garrett Flores; Kyle Burris; Dylan Walcik; Brenda Henkes; Jan Willette, as well as those active duty military members including Jeanna Willett; Arturo Mares; Keven Rios; Michael Graham; Brian Anderson; Landon Cheatham; Bryan Kubena; Brad Bergfeld; Cody Jowers; Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Ryan Neisner; Anthony D'Angelo; Dalton Kapel; Kindra Dawson; and William Phillips.

A We pray for the church throughout the world. May we all proclaim the good news of your love effectively. We ask, especially, that you would bless the ministry of our sister congregation, Cristo Rey in Peru, all Missionaries, especially St. Paul's supported missionary, Dina Anton de Espinoza, and our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic.

A brief silence.

A 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.

A brief silence.

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

C Amen.

* **PEACE**

P As Jesus shared peace, let us also share His peace with one another. *(Share the "Peace of the Lord" with your neighbors.)*

(We will be collecting offerings before and after worship each week. This includes Power of One dollars.)

PRESENTATION OF OUR GIFTS

“Power of One” is a ministry sponsored by your Stewardship Team. We are asking each and every one of our members to give \$1.00 above what your normal giving would be. We are asking each member to place this \$1.00 bill or change in the offering plate each week. The team is also inviting all children to participate to develop the habit of giving as part of their worship experience. Parents, a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, or dollar bill, any of these will do to help your children develop a habit of giving. These “Power of One” dollars will be used to support local ministries and ministries abroad. The purpose of this ministry is to demonstrate that something as small as one dollar can be used to make a difference in the lives of others.

* OFFERING PRAYER

P Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. You have set before us these gifts of your good creation. Prepare us for your heavenly banquet, nourish us with this rich food and drink, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

* REMEMBERING JESUS' WORDS, PROMISES, AND COMMANDS

* LORD'S PRAYER

P Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

C **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.**

* INVITATION TO COMMUNION

P Come to the banquet table where Christ gives himself as food and drink.

C Amen.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION (Continuous with Individual Cups)

{Distribution will be continuous. Please come down the center aisle starting from the front. Follow directions of the ushers, coming up one side at a time. Please keep 6 feet between those who are not your family members. Pastor will hand you the bread. If you wish to have a gluten-free wafer, please tell Pastor “Gluten-free, please.” Afterward, you will choose either wine or white grape juice from the individual cups in the tray – white grape juice in the center with wine surrounding. Place the empty cups in the baskets located off to the side. Although communion is continuous, you are welcome to kneel at the rail in prayer after receiving communion. Please return to your seat by the side aisles.}

* PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

P We give you thanks, gracious God, that you have once again fed us with food beyond compare, the body and blood of Christ. Lead us from this place, nourished and forgiven, into your beloved vineyard to wipe away the tears of all who hunger and thirst, guided by the example of the same Jesus Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

C Amen.

* BLESSING

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

C Amen.

* CLOSING SONG: ALL THE PEOPLE SAID AMEN!

**You are not alone if you are lonely.
When you feel afraid you're not the only.
We are all the same in need of mercy...
To be forgiven and be free.
It's all you got to lean on but thank God it's all you need!**

CHORUS:

***And all the people said Amen! Whoa – oh – oh;
And all the people said Amen!
Give thanks to the Lord for His love never ends.
And all the people said Amen!***

**If you're rich or poor it doesn't matter.
Weak or strong you know love's what we're after.
We're all broken but we're all in this together...
God knows we stumble and fall.
And He so loved the world, He sent His Son to save us all.**

CHORUS

**Blessed are the poor in spirit who are torn apart.
Blessed are the persecuted and the pure in heart.
Blessed are the people hungry for another start.
For theirs is the kingdom, the kingdom of God.**

CHORUS TWICE

TAG END

And all the people said, “Amen!”

* **DISMISSAL**

P Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God, and we will.**

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USHERS: Kevin & Wendy Page; Ryan Thomas

LAY READER: Heather Thomas

ALTAR GUILD: Pamela Cardenas

WELCOME: Welcome to worship and Christian education, a time to reconnect and form new connections. May the Lord enrich our time together.

ALTAR WALL FLOWERS are placed by Kenny & JoAnn Venghaus and Larry & Tootsie Venghaus in memory of Kenny & Larry's mother Lucille Venghaus for the anniversary of her birth on September 14.

ADDITIONAL FLOWERS are placed by Arnie Hageman in loving memory of Karen Hageman.

We are pleased to have Rev. John Hunsicker and Rev. Dr. Brian Gigea sharing their messages with us this weekend. Pastor John is presiding over worship service Saturday, September 12, and welcome back to Pastor Brian as he is presiding over both Sunday services on September 13 while Pastor Alan and Debbie are spending some well-deserved time away. Thank you Pastor John and Pastor Brian!! 😊

We extend our Christian sympathy to Courtney Busselman and her family for the loss of her grandmother Verline Schroeter who passed away this past week. May God comfort them during their time of loss.

COLLECTION OF OFFERING: Offering for the worship services is collected before and after worship. Offering bowls are placed in the back entrance and inside the side sanctuary door for you to place your offering in. This includes "Power of One" dollars.

Amount needed for average weekly budgeted expenses: \$8,405.00

Attendance: Sept. 5 & 6, 2020 – 87

Contributions: Sept. 5 & 6 – \$11,321.30

Power of One: Sept. 5 & 6, 2020 – \$36.00

Campaign Fund: Sept. 5 & 6 - \$5,480.00

Thank you to those who contributed to last week's offerings. Loving God/Loving Neighbor.

ATTENTION: Names on the prayer list *in the bulletin* will be printed for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, the names will be removed from the bulletin unless the church office has been notified to keep them.

♦ **GLUTEN-FREE WAFERS:** For those who are allergic to gluten, we will have a few gluten-free wafers available at communion. Please tell Pastor when coming forward, "Gluten-free, please."

** **NOTICE REGARDING BULLETINS:** Please take your bulletin home after worship. If you do not wish to take your bulletin home, please place it in the recycling container after worship. We will **not** be reusing them for the next service. Thank you! **

♦ **BLAST Home Edition will begin Wednesday, September 16, 2020 with "On Earth as in Heaven".** Over the course of five weeks we will look at the petitions of the Lord's Prayer and the connection between prayer and service in the world. You can pick up your BLAST Home Edition kit (which will include all five lessons and supplies) at the church today from 12:30-1:30 PM. We invite you and your family to join us on Facebook at 6:00 PM on Wednesday on the Saint Paul Lutheran Youth Page. We will introduce the lesson, share a special story, and give instructions on how to use your kit for that lesson. If you have questions or need more information, please contact Stephanie at 979-732-1858. In October we will re-evaluate the possibility of joining back together in person.

• **St. Paul Lutheran Youth Group:** High School Youth are planning to start meeting again on Wednesday nights **beginning September 23, 2020 from 6:30-7:30 PM.** We will meet in the high school youth room, and students will need to wear a mask when entering and leaving. The time is not yet known; however, it will be announced on Facebook, and parents and students will be contacted. Please be sure to register online by clicking on the BLAST registration link on our website www.splctx.com. If you have any questions, please contact Stephanie at 979-732-1858.

SAVE THE DATE: There will be a **Hurricane Laura Synod Workday on Saturday, September 19, 2020 from 7:30 AM-3:00 PM.** There will be two launch sites – Bridge City, TX or Lafayette, LA. The Synod Disaster Team is excited to partner with Lutheran Disaster Response, UpBring/Lutheran Social Service Disaster Response and the In Spiritus Disaster Response Team. The In Spiritus Response Team will lead the volunteers for the Lutheran Volunteer Day on September 19. Detailed information about how to volunteer and what is needed will be available soon!

CCC Toy/Supply Drive: St. Paul Lutheran CCC teachers are putting together a list of supplies needed for the school year and for the daycare classrooms. The items will be displayed on an apple tree in the narthex (foyer). Grab an apple – or 2 or 3 – to purchase the item. Items can be dropped off at the church office or the day care office. Thanks for your support of this ministry.





TAKE NOTE

NOW HIRING AT ST. PAUL CCC – St. Paul Lutheran Creative Childcare Center is hiring a caregiver to assist in the nursery. We are looking for a compassionate individual with infant experience for ages under one year old. This position is full-time. We are also looking to hire substitute teachers for all ages to work on an on-call, as needed basis. Please stop by the center to speak with the front office staff and fill out an application.

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Tues., Sept. 15 – 9:00 AM – Staff Meeting
12:00 PM – Noon Bible Study (library)
5:30 PM – Prayer Team (fellowship hall)

Wed., Sept. 16 – 9:00 AM – CCC Chapel
5:00 PM – Confirmation
6:00 PM – BLAST Home Edition

Thurs., Sept. 17 – Stephanie & Sandye at Continuing Education (via Zoom)
5:00 PM – Worship Team (fellowship hall)

Sat., Sept. 19 – 7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship

Next Sun., Sept. 20 – 9:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship
10:00 AM – Adult Sunday School (fellowship hall)
11:05 AM – Holy Communion Contemporary Worship

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Sunday, September 13, 2020 John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, died 407

John was a priest in Antioch and an outstanding preacher. His eloquence earned him the nickname "Chrysostom" ("golden mouth"). Appointed bishop of Constantinople, seat of the empire, he criticized corruption in the court. As a result, he was exiled by the empress.

Monday, September 14, 2020 Holy Cross Day

Helena, mother of Constantine, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and found what may be the actual site of Jesus' crucifixion. Her son built two churches there, and the dedication of one of them gave rise to this celebration of our Lord's victory on the cross.

Wednesday, September 16, 2020 Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, martyr, died around 258

Cyprian served as a bishop during a time of great persecution of Christians. He insisted on receiving back those who had left the faith under duress. He also provided medical care during a severe epidemic.

Thursday, September 17, 2020 Hildegard, Abbess of Bingen, died 1179

A mystic who was widely influential within the church, Hildegard advised and reproved kings and popes, wrote poems and hymns, and produced treatises in medicine, theology, and natural history. She was also a musician and artist.

Friday, September 18, 2020 Dag Hammarskjöld, renewer of society, died 1961

A Swedish diplomat, Hammarskjöld served as the second Secretary General of the United

Nations until his death in a plane crash while trying to negotiate peace in present-day Zambia. His journal, published as *Markings*, revealed the depth of his Christian faith. From sundaysandseasons.com. Copyright © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #SAS006327.

OTHER READINGS 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.

The reading begins:

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.

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.

OTHER READINGS: 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.

The reading begins:

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.

SERVICE OVERVIEW: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Being a disciple requires an expansive perspective on forgiveness. Today our perspective is broadened by the good news that God's forgiveness is not based on our idea of fairness, but rather on abundant, unimaginable grace. Like the psalm says God "does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities." The king forgives our entire debt, no matter how enormous it is. We also are challenged to stretch our perspective and forgive each other. With Peter, we learn to stop keeping score.

It's not an easy thing to do. Again and again we fall back on limited human understandings of what is "fair." Looking at the story of Joseph and his brothers, it's easy for us to say that his brothers really didn't deserve forgiveness. Their desperate plea for forgiveness was made in their own self-interest. It was dishonest and manipulative – so have they *really* repented? Joseph takes the wider view and realizes that it isn't his brothers' intentions that matter, but God's. God's forgiveness is much greater than what is fair, what we deserve.

So what does this new, broadened perspective look like in the lives of Christians and congregations? Paul provides a pragmatic glimpse: "Those 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." If all are truly welcomed by God, we are called to share the good news of that welcome in all we say and do.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

The gospel today is a harsh parable about forgiveness. Do you see yourself? Yet even if we feel condemned by this reading, we still receive God's mercy at the table of the Lord. Welcome to worship! Be forgiven. Be empowered to forgive others.

In today's parable there is a breakdown of relationships: the slave with his peer, the king with the slave. At the core of forgiveness is a change in relationship - a determination by all sides to find a way forward. It means relating to one another as broken people who have done terrible things

to each other, and who now know they have to find a future together. Jesus' forgiveness and his offer of a new world creates a bridge to a *new* relationship. In order for forgiveness to happen, something has to die, which precipitates the difficult question: *What* has to end (or die) so we can experience a rebirth within a relationship? Christians do *not*, in fact, live in godly perfection, but continuously need the mercy of God and the forgiveness of the community. The use of the imagery of debt suggests that we actually owe to one another both ethical living and gracious forgiveness.

Through the oxygen cycle, the earth provides the oxygen we need to be alive on this planet. However, unless our bodies breathe in the air, the earth's abundant oxygen will be of no use to us. The water cycle ensures that the earth creates plentiful sources of water, but if we do not collect and drink that water, we will become dehydrated. Similarly, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God has made God's free gift of forgiveness available to the world. Jesus suggests in this gospel reading from Matthew that the act of forgiving helps us both to tap into God's abundant stores of mercy and to extend that mercy to others. Knowing that God's forgiveness is available for us should, Jesus teaches, empower us to be generous in the ways we show forgiveness to our neighbors who do us harm.

The Lord's Prayer includes a petition that summarizes today's allegory: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." Matthew's version of this prayer uses the word "debt," and Luke's both "debt" and "sin." The 1988 international English translation of the prayer uses "sin," since "debt" now usually connotes finances, and "trespass," begun in the third century, now usually refers to walking on another's private property. "First be reconciled with your brother or sister," says Matthew. One of the meanings of our greeting of peace during worship enacts Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers: we are reconciled with one another before we join together at the table of the risen Christ. "Peace be with you..." is not merely a morning greeting – it is the passing of the peace is a sign of forgiveness within the community.

KID STUDY:

How many times do you think a person should be forgiven for doing something wrong? Once? Twice? Three times? If you were to ask Jesus how many times you should forgive someone, what do you think he would say? Well, we don't have to guess, because the Bible gives us the answer.

One day, Peter asked Jesus, "How many times should I forgive someone who sins against me? Should I forgive him seven times?" I imagine that Peter thought he was being pretty generous to forgive someone seven times. I don't know about you, but I think I agree with Peter. To forgive someone seven times is be pretty generous. Guess what? Jesus didn't agree. He answered Peter, "Not seven times, but seventy times seven."

Wow! Seventy times seven! That's four hundred and ninety times. I think that before I got to four hundred and ninety I would lose count. You know, I think that is probably what Jesus was trying to get Peter to understand and he wants us to understand it too. We shouldn't worry about keeping count of how many times we have forgiven someone -- we should just keep on forgiving.

Isn't that what God does? He doesn't keep count of how many times he has forgiven us. He just keeps on forgiving.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

The evil of remembering past offenses is twofold: it is inexcusable before God, and it serves to recall past sins already forgiven and places them against us. Nothing whatsoever does God so hate, and turn away from, as cherishing remembrance of past offenses and fostering our anger against another. If we must remember offenses, let us remember only our own. If we remember our own sins, we shall never store up the sins of others. I shall make bold to say that this sin is more grievous than any other sin. Let us be zealous in nothing so much as in keeping ourselves free from anger and from not seeking to be reconciled with those who are opposed to us. Neither is this my word only, but the word of that God who shall come to judge us. - John Chrysostom [John Chrysostom, in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, IV, 289.]

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Next Week's Theme (September 19 & 20): "The Challenge with Self" (upset at God's generosity toward others)

Next Week's Scriptures (September 19 & 20):

First Reading: Jonah 3:10 - - 4:11

"God's concern for the city of Neneveh."

Psalm: Psalm 145:1-8

"The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." (Ps. 145:8)

Second Reading: Philippians 1:21-30

"Standing firm in the gospel."

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

"The parable of the vineyard workers."