

Home worship service during time of isolation and social distancing.

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 13, 2020

In our Gospel Lesson today we have four important sections of Holy Scriptures: Who Is the Greatest?; Temptations to Sin; The Parable of the Lost Sheep; and If Your Brother Sins Against You. Each of these portions of the Bible is worthy of our special consideration. Together they embody valuable lessons on love: God's love for us and our response by loving people around us.

In times of need Christians throughout the centuries have cried out, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." God in His mercy has given His Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins. This mercy and forgiveness are so great that we cannot withhold this same forgiveness from the people around us. Unfortunately, this is not always true. In the Gospel lesson today Peter asks, "How often should I forgive my brother?" Jesus answers in the form of the parable of the Unmerciful Servant. He gives a severe warning to any who refuse to forgive.

Holy Spirit, Light Divine Lutheran Service Book 496, Lutheran Worship 166, The Lutheran Hymnal 234



1 Ho - ly Spir - it, light di - vine, Shine up - on this heart of mine;
2 Let me see my Sav - ior's face, Let me all His beau - ties trace;
3 Ho - ly Spir - it, pow'r di - vine, Cleanse this guilt - y heart of mine;
4 Ho - ly Spir - it, joy di - vine, Cheer this sad - dened heart of mine;
5 Ho - ly Spir - it, all di - vine, Dwell with - in this heart of mine;



Chase the shades of night a - way, Turn the dark - ness in - to day.
Show those glo - rious truths to me Which are on - ly known to Thee.
In Thy mer - cy pit - y me, From sin's bond - age set me free.
Yield a sa - cred, set - tled peace, Let it grow and still in - crease.
Cast down ev - 'ry i - dol throne, Reign su - preme, and reign a - lone.

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L In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Our help is in the name of the Lord,

C **who made heaven and earth.** (*Psalm 124:8*)

L Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

C **Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.** (*Psalm 19:12, 13*)

L If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand?

C **But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.** (*Psalm 130:3-4*)

L Let us, confess before God that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and as His people let us take refuge in His infinite mercy seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, saying:

C **God, be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.** (*Luke 18:13*)

L Almighty God, merciful Father, in Your holy Church, You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

Introit Psalm 143:1–2; antiphon: Psalm 143:9

L Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord!
I have fled to you for refuge!

C Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy!
In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!

L Enter not into judgment with your servant,
for no one living is righteous before you.

C Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

L Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord!
I have fled to you for refuge!

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Christ, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

Gloria in Excelsis ~ Glory to God in the Highest

L Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

C Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father: We worship You, we give You thanks, and we praise You for Your glory.

L Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, You are Lord and God, You are the Lamb of God:

C Lord Jesus Christ, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

L Lord Jesus Christ, You are seated at the right hand of the Father; and we ask you to graciously receive our prayer.

C For You alone are the Holy One,
You alone are the Lord,
You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day

L Let us pray: O God, our refuge and strength, the author of all godliness, hear the devout prayers of Your Church, especially in times of persecution, and grant that what we ask in faith we may obtain; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

Genesis 50:15–21

¹⁵When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, ¹⁷'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept

alive, as they are today. ²¹So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Gradual Psalm 34:9, 19, alt.

L Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing!

C Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

Psalm 103:1–12

L ¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

C ²**Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,**

L ³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

C ⁴**who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,**

L ⁵who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

C ⁶**The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.**

L ⁷He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

C ⁸**The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**

L ⁹He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

C ¹⁰**He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.**

L ¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

C ¹²**as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.**

Romans 14:1–12

¹As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ²One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 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, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? 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 confess to God.”

¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day Matthew 6:14

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. If you forgive others their trespasses, Alleluia.
- C** Alleluia, Alleluia. Your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Alleluia.

Matthew 18:21–35

- L** The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 18th chapter.
- C** **Glory to You, O Lord.**

²¹Then Peter came up and said to [Jesus], “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²²Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

²³“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³²Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

- L** This is the Gospel of the Lord.
- C** **Praise to You, O Christ.**

C **I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, His 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 into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven**

**and sits at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living
and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**



1 To Thee, om - ni - scient Lord of all, In grief and shame I
 2 O Lord, my God, to Thee I pray: O cast me not in
 3 O Je - sus, let Thy pre - cious blood Be to my soul a



hum - bly call; I see my sins a - gainst Thee, Lord,
 wrath a - way! Let Thy good Spir - it ne'er de - part,
 cleans - ing flood. Turn not, O Lord, Thy guest a - way,



The sins of thought and deed and word. They press me
 But let Him draw to Thee my heart That tru - ly
 But grant that jus - ti - fied I may Go to my



sore; I cry to Thee: O God, be mer - ci - ful to me!
 pen - i - tent I be: O God, be mer - ci - ful to me!
 house at peace with Thee: O God, be mer - ci - ful to me!

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Devotional thoughts:

Fans of the computer-animated film series “Toy Story” are familiar with Buzz Lightyear’s famous catchphrase, “To infinity and beyond.” It is recognized as one of the most famous movie quotes of all-time.

Long before the advent of Toy Story, my children would try to outdo each other in their boasting. At some point in an attempt to outclass a sibling, one of them would declare that they could do something “to infinity.” To which the other would respond, “I can do it infinity plus one!” and so the competition would continue.

Of course, both of these are just entertaining ways to play with language. By definition, nothing can exceed infinity. Yet this exercise in poetic license can provide some insight into the Gospel lesson for today.

In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus had just instructed His disciples on forgiveness. In verse 21 we read, then Peter came up and said to Him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

To our ears, seven is a large number of times to repeat forgiveness to the same person. By human reckoning, forgiving even once is a big deal. Forgiving twice would be saint like.

Yet those who are familiar with the usage of symbolic numbers in scripture will recognize seven as a number representing completeness. In a way, Peter was asking, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? To infinity?” With this in mind, Jesus responds with words that our 21st Century ears should hear in this way, “I do not say to you to infinity but to infinity and beyond,” or “Infinity times infinity times ten.”

I know that this sounds incredible but to make sure that we get it Jesus tells The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. In this parable, we learn of a servant who owes the king ten thousand talents. How he acquired such a huge debt is not important to the parable. A footnote in the English Standard Version (ESV) translation of this

passage indicates that a talent was a monetary unit equivalent to about twenty years' wages for a laborer. Doing the math with that in mind, we discover that this servant owed the king two hundred thousand years' wages.

Yet when the servant pleads for mercy, the king forgives him this seemingly infinite amount! Every time I read this parable, I am amazed at the infinite mercy of the king. I am amazed because Jesus intends for me to see myself as this servant owing an immeasurable immense debt to the King of the Universe, God Himself!

At this point, Jesus' parable takes an unexpectedly dark turn. Instead of rejoicing in forgiveness and rescue from prison for himself and his family, this unmerciful servant turns with a hard heart to his brother. Another servant owes him a hundred denarii. The footnote tells us that a denarius is about a day's wage. Doing the math, this servant owes about three months of labor. This is not a small amount but it is infinitesimally small compared to the 200,000 years labor just forgiven by the king.

With remarkable ruthlessness, the unmerciful servant has this poor fellow thrown into prison! In fact, justice is served. The debt is owed. It must be paid.

This parable reveals a deep and troubling facet of human nature. We all want mercy for ourselves but we demand justice when it comes to others!

We experience some infringement on our personal space or rights and immediately we boil over in anger and indignation. This is how road rage happens. Someone cuts you off in traffic and we seek ways to retaliate.

It happens at school, at work, in our families, and among our friends. It happens with strangers, with employees and bosses, and too often with those we love the most.

We hold grudges. We resent people. We live with bitterness and anger because someone sinned against us.

Jesus uses this parable to help us put things in perspective. Yes, there is no doubt that you have been wronged and hurt. Just as the servant was owed a hundred denarii, you are within your rights to demand justice. However, when you do, you have forgotten and rejected God's mercy to you!

The offenses against each of us are incredibly small compared to the offenses that we have committed against God and His holy law. Our sinfulness is so deep in our hearts that we have a hard time recognizing just how corrupt human nature is.

When we compare ourselves to others, we come to the conclusion, "I'm not so bad." Only comparing ourselves to God's holiness can we begin to recognize what it means to have our debt of sin to God forgiven.

The great prophet Isaiah had one such experience. He witnessed the Lord sitting on His throne. He heard the angels declare, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." To this, Isaiah responded, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Because of our sinfulness, we all join Isaiah. We all declare, "Woe is me! For I am lost" (Isaiah 6). It is only facing this reality of sin and lostness that we begin to grasp the depth of God's love for us in Christ.

Jesus came into this sinful world to save sinners. He did not come to point the way to heaven. He did not come to show us how to earn and deserve heaven. He came to be the sacrifice for sin. He came to BE the Way, the Truth, and the Life!

Our debt of sin to God is infinitely immense. No human could ever hope to pay for his own sin. Certainly, no one could pay for the sin of another. Yet, thanks be to God. Jesus, the very Son of God, paid the debt of sin for the entire human race. That's what we mean when we recognize Him as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!

Our lessons for today contain two of my favorite Bible passages. The first one is Psalm 103 verse 12, "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." God's forgiveness is never partial. It is absolutely complete! When God forgives you, He takes your sins away as far as the east is from the west.

The second one is our Old Testament lesson for today. I am certain that in life, each of us has been mistreated. We live among sinful people and it can't be avoided. Yet few of us have been mistreated as badly as Joseph. His brothers wanted him dead. They sold him into slavery. As a slave, he was falsely accused and thrown into prison. Yet through all of this injustice, God was with him. He became second in command of all Egypt!

After his father died, Joseph's brothers came to him pleading forgiveness. Joseph certainly would have been within his rights to extract justice. Instead, he tells his brothers. "You meant evil against me, but God meant it

for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.”

Throughout your life, sinful people will cause you pain and suffering. God does not send evil into our lives but just as He did for Joseph, God can turn things around for your good and the blessing of others. As we take Jesus’ parable to heart, may God grant us the grace to pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others.” Amen.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

God’s richest blessings to you in Christ.

L Almighty God, as once You kept Joseph from evil and brought good from his suffering in Egypt, deliver us by Your grace so that we may learn patience in trials. Teach us to be slow to judge, quick to forgive, and steadfast in love for You and for one another.

C Amen.

L Merciful Lord, You have shown great compassion to us; teach us to show such compassion to others, that we may welcome the stranger, love our neighbor in need, and be attentive to those new to the faith or vulnerable to temptation. Help us to serve the refugee seeking safety, and give us opportunity to share Your gifts with those who live in poverty and want.

C Amen.

L O Lord, grant us the gifts of wisdom and discretion, kindness and faithfulness, so that we may effectively teach and guide, and grant to all Your people a ready willingness to learn. Let the knowledge of Your Word be preserved and extended among us so that all may know and praise You now and forever; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

L Almighty God, in this time of national distress and distrust, give our leaders wisdom for the challenges ahead. Send Your holy angels to watch over all of our loved ones, especially those who live in distant places. Protect all who attend to our needs during this time of national emergency and pandemic.

C Amen.

C I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

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.

L Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

L The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

C Amen.



1 Praise to the Lord, the Al - might - y, the King of cre -
2 Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things is won - drous - ly
3 Praise to the Lord, who has fear - ful - ly, won - drous - ly,
4 Praise to the Lord, who will pros - per your work and de -



a - tion! O my soul, praise Him, for He is your
reign - ing And, as on wings of an ea - gle, up -
made you, Health has be - stowed and, when heed - less - ly
fend you; Sure - ly His good - ness and mer - cy shall



health and sal - va - tion! Let all who hear Now to His
lift - ing, sus - tain - ing. Have you not seen All that is
fall - ing, has stayed you. What need or grief Ev - er has
dai - ly at - tend you. Pon - der a - new What the Al -



tem - ple draw near, Join - ing in glad ad - o - ra - tion!
need - ful has been Sent by His gra - cious or - dain - ing?
failed of re - lief? Wings of His mer - cy did shade you.
might - y can do As with His love He be - friends you.

- 5 Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before Him!
Let the Amen
Sound from His people again;
Gladly forever adore Him!

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Service Notes:

One person may serve as Leader or this may be shared with a number of individuals.

Read one or more of the lessons. Hymns may be sung or read. Use as much or little of this service as you would like.

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Enhancing Your Worship

Meditating on God's Word and Works

I will meditate on your wondrous works. Psalm 119:27
My eyes are awake through the night watches,
That I may meditate on Your word. Psalm 119:148 NKJV

The Week of the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 14 - 19

Introduction

Most modern forms of meditation turn a person inward. Biblical meditation turns a person outward toward what God has said and done especially what He has said and done through Jesus for our salvation.

Each Sunday has its own special theme directing us to meditate on God's word and actions. This theme is found in the Propers of the Day (the parts of the service that change week to week). From Advent through the Easter season these themes focus our attention on the life of Jesus from His birth to His death and resurrection. There is always much more in the propers than can be covered in any Sunday service. God willing, I will use the propers for Sunday to provide you with a devotion each day to help you meditate on what God has done for you.

Monday

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

Introit Psalm 143:1–2; antiphon: Psalm 143:9

- L** Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord!
I have fled to you for refuge!
- C** **Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy!**
In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!
- L** Enter not into judgment with your servant,
for no one living is righteous before you.
- C** **Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;**
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.
- L** Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord!
I have fled to you for refuge!

Kyrie

- L** O Lord, **C** **Have mercy on us.**
L O Christ, **C** **Have mercy on us.**
L O Lord, **C** **Have mercy on us.**

Those only marginally familiar with Scripture will sometimes say, "Forgiveness is a New Testament concept. The Old Testament is about justice."

Psalm 143:2 puts that idea to rest. David declares, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you." In his plea for mercy, David recognizes that no one can stand before a just God. In God's eyes, no one is righteous!

In our human sense of righteousness, we are quick to bring down wrath and judgment upon others. It is easy to join with the Pharisees in condemning people around us whom we perceive to be less honorable.

We read in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

In no way does Jesus mean to say, "Don't call sin "sin." Rather, when we see sin in others that we are quick to condemn, pause and examine our own lives and seek mercy from God.

We read this event from Jesus' life when He ate with those whom the Pharisees considered "sinners."

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:9-13)

In Psalm 143, David recognized his need for mercy. May we join him!

L Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we join David in his plea, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you." Grant us comfort from Jesus' words, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" through the same Jesus Christ our Lord who with You and the Holy Spirit are one God, now and forever.

C Amen

Tuesday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day Matthew 6:14

L Alleluia, Alleluia. If you forgive others their trespasses, Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. Your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Christ, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

L Let us pray. O God, our refuge and strength, the author of all godliness, hear the devout prayers of Your Church, especially in times of persecution, and grant that what we ask in faith we may obtain; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

In touring England, you will discover that many castles have an inner most sanctuary called "the keep." It is the place of last defense. As each outer fortification falls to the attackers, defenders fall back until they are in the safest place, the keep.

It is no doubt that we live in dangerous times. Our cities no longer seem to be places of safety. Civil unrest and the spreading pandemic cause us all to retreat to areas of shelter. Eventually, all earthly protection gives

way and we are forced to remember that God is our refuge and strength as Psalm 46 reminds us.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way (Psalm 46:1-2a).

Or as Martin Luther paraphrased it:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev'ry need
That hath us now o'ertaken.

With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the valiant One,
Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is,
Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there's none other God;
He holds the field forever.

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God LSB 656 Stanzas 1a, 2. Public domain

Prayer: O God, our refuge and strength, the author of all godliness, hear the devout prayers of Your Church, especially in times of persecution, and grant that what we ask in faith we may obtain; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

Verse of the Day Matthew 6:14

L Alleluia, Alleluia. If you forgive others their trespasses, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. Your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.
L O Christ, **C** Have mercy on us.
L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

Psalm 103:1–12

L ¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
C ²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,
L ³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
C ⁴who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
L ⁵who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
C ⁶The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.
L ⁷He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

C ⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

L ⁹He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

C ¹⁰He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

L ¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

C ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” We cannot hear these comforting words too often. When we hear these words, we join David in blessing the Lord. We give Him thanks for His mercy and grace in Christ.

We bless the Lord because He forgives all our iniquity. It is beyond our human imagination to fully understand God’s grace. Therefore, David writes, “As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

Let us never be afraid to “Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

Prayer: O Lord, thank you for the grace and mercy shown to those who humbly confess sins before you. Grant that we may always be numbered among who return to You. Amen.

Thursday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day Matthew 6:14

L Alleluia, Alleluia. If you forgive others their trespasses, Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. Your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Christ, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

Genesis 50:15–21

¹⁵When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” ¹⁶So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died, ¹⁷‘Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph is one of the most apt examples of St. Paul’s statement in Romans 8:28, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

It is very difficult to remember this in times of adversity. Nevertheless, it certainly is true when we are given the perspective of time.

My father was not raised as a Christian. However, when he returned from the Korean War, the first thing

he did was go to my mother's pastor and ask to be baptized and confirmed. Throughout the rest of his life, he only spoke sparingly about his war experiences. Yet, I do know that he spent many days and nights on the front line. He saw his friends severely wounded and killed. He escaped from behind enemy lines. He experienced cold and hunger in ways that I cannot imagine. While withdrawing from one position, he was the last man to make it out. Everyone behind him was either captured or killed.

None of those things could be counted as "blessings." But God used them to bless my father with faith.

As we struggle through the adversities of life, may we also have the attitude of Joseph. Although many things that come our way may be evil, God is able to use them for our good and eternal blessing.

Prayer: O Lord God, grant us the faith and faithfulness of Joseph that we would see your gracious hand in our lives even in times of adversity, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Friday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day Matthew 6:14

L Alleluia, Alleluia. If you forgive others their trespasses, Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. Your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Christ, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

Romans 14:1–12

¹As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ²One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 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, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? 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 confess to God.”

¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

There was a time not too long ago when almost everyone in the western world was grounded in Biblical

literacy. From William Shakespeare to George Washington, writers freely used biblical allusions to illustrate their points. From farm hands to business executives, from cowboys to newspaper reporters, from steamboat crews to navy admirals, it was assumed that biblical truths were well known if not necessarily accepted.

Unfortunately, this is not the case today. Television pundits, political analysts, teachers, and professors pompously display their ignorance of scripture.

In today's world, a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle is seen by some to be "more spiritual" or "more righteous." Many who should have knowledge of Scripture and the Christian faith often will agree with this assessment. Therefore, they are surprised to read in Romans that it is those who are weak in faith eat only vegetables.

Yet Paul warns, "Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?"

In Christian charity, we are bound to love one another, even if their dietary decisions seem to be suspect in our minds. The same principle applies to those who set aside one day to worship or another. Paul writes, "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God."

What is the ultimate rationale for this attitude? Paul explains, "For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If 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. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

Our actions here on earth always should be viewed with an eye to eternity. In life or death, we are the Lord's! Eating or not, sleeping or not, observing a day or not, whatever we are or aren't doing, we belong to the Lord. May all that we think, say, or do be tempered by the knowledge that we belong to the Lord.

Prayer: O Lord, give us a gentle spirit towards those practice their faith in a way that is different from ours. Let us never forget that whether we live or die, we are the Lords. Amen.

Saturday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day Matthew 6:14

L Alleluia, Alleluia. If you forgive others their trespasses, Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. Your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Alleluia.

Gradual Psalm 34:9, 19, alt.

L Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing!

C Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Christ, **C** Have mercy on us.

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

As usual, the scripture lessons this week have presented us with a multitude of themes and ideas to help us grow in faith and love. Still, the central theme was how God's mercy and forgiveness should show itself in our lives. We are the recipients of more than we could ever hope for from God.

In Jesus' we have become His own. We have received forgiveness, life, and salvation. In view of this, let us never withhold the same mercy and forgiveness from those around us.

Luther's Small Catechism: The Fifth Petition

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

Prayer:

☐ Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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