



Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 13, 2020

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, we are renewed in baptism to be signs of reconciliation in the world.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity one God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. **Amen.**

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

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

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

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

We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.

We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.

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

We sin in thought, word, and deed.

By your grace, forgive us; through your love, renew us;

and in your Spirit, lead us;

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

Beloved of God,

by the radical abundance of divine mercy

we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus,

through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.

Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope.

For hope does not disappoint,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn ELW # 834 / LBW # 526 *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*

Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Psalmody: Psalm 103:1-13

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name.

²**Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits—**

³who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases;

⁴**who 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.

⁶**O 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.

⁸**LORD, 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.

¹⁰**You 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.

¹²**As 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.

Second Reading: 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.

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.

Reflection on the Text

Poor ole Paul. He has another set of disagreements to settle from a distance. This time it's in Rome, in a congregation he had never meet. In fact, it is suspected that he had never been to Rome.

The disagreements that were listed were over food and Sabbath ritual rules. Paul took an interesting approach; he didn't take sides. Paul encouraged the strong to include, in fact to welcome, those who were weaker. If you notice, Paul did not identify whether the strong were the Gentile-Christians or the Jewish-Christians. Paul understood that there are those who need to bolster their faith by using more restrictions. Then there are those who have a stronger faith, who have more relaxed approaches.

That is one of the more interesting parts of this whole thing. The problems are strictly in-house. This is like arguing over whether to use wafers or Hawaiian bread for Communion. It is all internal. Paul makes it clear that each group should be better behaved toward the other. They are all a part of the same group, Christians.

Thanks to God's love, they and we all grow in faith. Of course, we all take steps backward or sideways due to being human. Yet, with God's help, we grow stronger in our faith. God shares God's mercy and compassion toward all of humanity, then and now. Paul points out that the Romans, and us too, die in Christ and rise in Christ. Through Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are led on our faith journeys - led to each place we are supposed to be.

That means we will be at different places on the path. As Paul mentions in Chapter 12, we all have our own unique gifts to discover and to use for God's glory. We are all part of the greater community in Christ. We have heard repeatedly in Romans that everything we have in life is a gift from God. That includes our very own lives.

Paul wants the Roman congregation, and us too, to remember that we all belong to God. As such, we should not condemn someone because they do something differently than we do. Also, we should not exclude someone because their faith journey looks different than ours. Work out a solution if need be. Be kind to each other; love one another. Let God be the judge of what is right and wrong. God sees this a lot clearer than we do. Be aware, we all one day will face God. In verse 11 we read, "For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.'"

As we go about things in this world and follow God on our journeys, Paul encourages us to have faith and be intentional. Know deep down that God loves us and we are to reflect God's love to the world. When we have different perspectives on what to do, be kind. Love one another. Rejoice that there are differences.

One of the things that I celebrate is the differences in Christian denominations. Episcopalian, Methodist, Reformed, Catholic, Baptist. They are all Christian. They each bring different gifts and abilities to the Body of Christ. In my own path, I am very much a Lutheran-flavored Christian. Yet I thank God there are the other denominations as well. We all belong to God. We all have our own personal and collective journeys.

When the moments come up that Christians have a disagreement, remember that we all belong to God. That person who is weaker or stronger in our eyes is a brother or sister in Christ. God loves that person as much as God loves me or you. If pain or hurt comes from the disagreement, show forgiveness.

As Jesus tells Peter in the Gospel, forgive whoever hurts you. It may not be easy. In fact, it can be hard. But as God forgives us, so we should forgive others. Do not let your judgement of someone else be held against you. We do not have to agree on everything. We can worship God, love one another, and live our lives without holding on to hate or a negative judgement.

That way, we all can enjoy and celebrate that God loves us all enough to care for us. Rejoice that God shows mercy on us. Rejoice that Jesus came, died, and was resurrected to offer redemption to all of us. Rejoice in the differences that God has given us. Amen

Hymn of the Day ELW # 359 / LBW # 126 *Where Charity and Love Prevail*

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

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 again to judge the living and the dead.**

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

Prayers of Intercession

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

A brief silence.

You welcome us when we are weak in faith. Uphold your church throughout the world; make it a place of welcome. Strengthen faith through Bible studies and Sunday schools, confirmation classes and youth ministries. Nurture us as we do these things in new and different ways. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

The heights of the heavens show us the vastness of your steadfast love. Have compassion on your creation. Where human selfishness has brought ruin and destruction, we look to you to heal, renew, and redeem your world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Make your ways known to the nations. Speak kindness to our bitter grudges. Settle our hearts when we want to settle accounts with violence. Bless our leaders with patience and wisdom. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bring healing and justice wherever harm is dealt. Provide vindication for all who are oppressed. Free victims of human trafficking and forced labor; deliver all who are bound by debt. Feed all who hunger, and guard refugees fleeing famine, poverty, and war. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Teach us to forgive. Still our tongues when we are tempted to pass judgment and argue over opinions. Make us a community of mercy for one another and for all our neighbors. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Whether we live or whether we die, we are yours. We thank you for those who have showed us faithfulness, for the knees that taught us how to bow to you and the tongues that taught us to praise you. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**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.

Closing Hymn # 665 / LBW # 393

Rise, Shine, You People!

Worship adapted from sundaysandseasons.com. Copyright © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #SAS027356.

Today's reflection was written by Vicar Mike Lang.