

**FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST WORSHIP SERVICE
A SERVICE OF FORGIVENESS**

WORDS OF WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP THROUGH SONG: “*We Have Come*” by: Christopher Grundy
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gdc2s-omCf8>

PRAYER OF INVOCATION: 

L: Compassionate-One, Lover-of-Goodness, Patience-with-Sinners,
Draw near to us.

Surround us with confidence in your good news:
that you love us as devoted parents love their children;
that your mercy is boundless and generous,
that you beckon us always and will wait forever as we find our way back to you.

All: Open our hearts to receive your compassion; and then show us how to forgive, so that we may be vessels of resurrection hope in our troubled world.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

PROFESSION OF FAITH: #887 “*A New Creed*” (United Church of Canada, 1980)

One: We are not alone, we live in God’s world.

*All: We believe in God: who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the word made flesh,*

To reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust God.

We are called to be the Church:

to celebrate God’s presence, to love and serve others,

*To seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus,
crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.*

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

HYMN OF GATHERING: #470 v. 1 “*God Is Here as We Your People*”

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SCRIPTURE & REFLECTION:

Forgiveness, guilt, shame and judgment are issues in our lives that can have great impact on how we see ourselves and others and ultimately on how we live our lives. This passage also reveals God’s presence even the negative things that we do or have happen to us. Let us listen to these words from Genesis and see what they might reveal to us.

Genesis 50:15-21 (MSG) (Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#))

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ After burying his father, Joseph went back to Egypt. All his brothers who had come with him to bury his father returned with him. After the funeral, Joseph’s brothers talked among themselves: “What if Joseph is carrying a grudge and decides to pay us back for all the wrong we did him?”

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ So they sent Joseph a message, “Before his death, your father gave this command: Tell Joseph, ‘Forgive your brothers’ sin—all that wrongdoing. They did treat you very badly.’ Will you do it? Will you forgive the sins of the servants of your father’s God?”

When Joseph received their message, he wept.

¹⁸ Then the brothers went in person to him, threw themselves on the ground before him and said, “We’ll be your slaves.”

¹⁹⁻²¹ Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid. Do I act for God? Don’t you see, you planned evil against me but God used those same plans for my good, as you see all around you right now—life for many people. Easy now, you have nothing to fear; I’ll take care of you and your children.” He reassured them, speaking with them heart-to-heart.

Psalm 103 *The Psalms are very unique in scripture for not only are they songs and prayers to God, but they are also like all other scripture, God’s revelation to humanity. This Psalm is a song of praise as well as one that reveals many things that God does for humanity including forgiveness. Let us listen to the word of God.*

Psalm 103:1-13 (The Voice) (The Voice Bible Copyright © 2012 Thomas Nelson, Inc. The Voice™ translation © 2012 Ecclesia Bible Society All rights reserved.)

A song of David.

¹ O my soul, *come*, praise the Eternal with all that is in me—

body, emotions, mind, and will—every part of who I am— praise His holy name.

² O my soul, *come*, praise the Eternal;

sing a song from a grateful heart; sing and never forget all the good He has done.

³ Despite all your *many* offenses, He forgives *and releases* you.

More than any doctor, He heals your diseases.

⁴ He reaches *deep* into the pit to deliver you from death.

He crowns you with unfailing love and compassion like a king.

⁵ *When your soul is famished and withering,*

He fills you with good *and beautiful* things, satisfying you as long as you live.

He makes you *strong* like an eagle, restoring your youth.

⁶ When people are crushed, *wronged, enslaved, raped, murdered,* the Eternal is just; He makes the wrongs right.

⁷ He showed Moses His ways;

He allowed His people Israel to see His *wonders and acts of power.*

⁸ The Eternal is compassionate and merciful. *When we cross all the lines,*

He is patient *with us.* *When we struggle against Him,*

He lovingly stays with us—*changing, convicting, prodding;*

⁹ He will not constantly criticize, nor will He hold a grudge forever.

¹⁰ *Thankfully,* God does not punish us for our sins and depravity as we deserve.

In His mercy, He tempers justice with peace.

¹¹ *Measure* how high heaven is above the earth;

God’s *wide, loving, kind* heart is greater for those who revere Him

¹² *You see,* God takes *all* our crimes—*our seemingly inexhaustible sins*

—and removes them. As far as east is from the west, *He removes them* from us.

¹³ An *earthly* father expresses love for his children;

it is no different *with our heavenly Father;*

The Eternal shows His love for those who revere Him.

Matthew *Once again we will hear about the topic of forgiveness for the third time today. Peter was struggling with the same thing we struggle with today, how many times should I forgive the same offender repeated offenses. In understanding this passage it might be helpful to know Peter’s background understanding of forgiveness in that “The teaching within Judaism (based on [Amos 1:3](#); [2:6](#); [Job 33:29, 30](#)) is that three times was enough to show a forgiving spirit. Rabbinic Judaism recognized that repeat offenders may not really be repenting at all: “If a man commits a transgression, the first, second and third time he is forgiven, the fourth time he is not” (b. Yoma 86b, 87a). The Mishnah is even less forgiving: “If a man said, ‘I will sin and repent, and sin again and repent,’ he will be given no chance to repent.”¹ Peter probably thought he was being more than generous with his offer to forgive 7 times being more than double of what he learned should be offered.*

A Story About Forgiveness

²¹ At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, “Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?”

²² Jesus replied, “Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.

²³⁻²⁵ “The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn’t pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.

²⁶⁻²⁷ “The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.

²⁸ “The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay up. Now!’

²⁹⁻³¹ “The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ But he wouldn’t do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.

³²⁻³⁵ “The king summoned the man and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn’t you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?’ The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that’s exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn’t forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy.”

Please use these thoughts for time of reflection and sharing

- **Today we read from 3 different passages in the bible but they all had one thing in common, they all spoke of forgiveness. What are some things you learned about forgiveness from these passages?**
- **What are some things that were reinforced about your understanding of forgiveness?**
- **Joseph’s brothers had already been forgiven by Joseph, but obviously they didn’t trust that was offered without condition. Why do you think they sought Joseph’s forgiveness again?**
- **Do you think they ever forgave themselves for their actions?**
- **Why might it be important to not only accept forgiveness from another and/or God, but to forgive one’s self?**

TESTIMONIES OF FORGIVENESS:

Theologian Karoline Lewis shared this quote from her yoga instructor in her reflections on forgiveness--- *“Forgiveness is letting go of the hope that the past can be changed.”*

(<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3322>)

Forgiveness is not saying what one did is acceptable or even at the bare minimum, tolerable; if that were the case forgiveness would not be needed; it is an acknowledgment that something did occur that needs forgiving. Forgiving ourselves and others is not forgetting or erasing the past, or moving on and just pretending the past didn’t happen, but not letting the past control and define who we are. We can learn from the past and let those lessons transform our future.

Does anyone remember the name of Amber Guyger. She was the ex-police officer convicted of murdering Botham Jean, a young black man, whom she thought was an intruder in her apartment but mistakenly got off on the wrong floor and entered Botham’s apartment and shot him in fear. At her sentencing trial last October, Botham’s brother Brandt offered her forgiveness for her actions and told Amber that he wanted only the best for her, and that he wanted her to give her life to Christ, something that he said Botham would have wanted as well. He then asked the judge if he might approach her and give her an embrace. I remember watching the news videos of this and it brought tears to my eyes. Sure she still had to serve time for her actions, forgiveness did not remove all

consequences of her actions, but they were able to move forward in their lives free from hatred, anger, hostility and division.

Brandt was given an award for ethical leadership by the police and though not all people were pleased with his willingness to forgive, rather than lashing out at those who felt forgiveness too freely he responded this way. As he spoke to law enforcement who presented him with the award he said, "December to law enforcement officials who gave him an award for ethical leadership: "I want you all to know that I am not a threat, that young black males are not inherently dangerous or criminal, I implore you to champion policies and procedures that amplify the value of all lives."

(<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5454>)

Rather than fuel hatred and condemnation, while acknowledging that there are some things that need revamping, change, improvement, he sought transformation and unification. This is possible when forgiveness is both offered and received.

My second testimony on forgiveness comes from Corrie ten Boom who was a Dutch Christian woman who was imprisoned in the Ravensbruck concentration camp for hiding Jews in her home. She lost her beloved sister at the camp but after the war, she traveled around Europe, preaching the Christian gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation. She writes of an encounter with a former guard from Ravensbruck whom she recognized at a talk she gave at a German church in 1947. He came up to her afterwards, told her that he had become a Christian, that he knew God had forgiven him, but he wanted to ask for her forgiveness. He held out his hand but she felt nothing but anger for him.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling."

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.

(<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5454>)

Dear Jesus, you are the one who cried out from the cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." It was you who taught us to pray forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." It is you who taught us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. It is you who taught us to not overcome evil with evil but to overcome evil with good. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to embrace and understand more fully the gift of forgiveness, both in giving and receiving it so that not only will our lives be transformed by this magnificent gift, but so that the world may be transformed. Without your Holy Spirit we cannot do this on our own. Help us and empower us to be both the receivers and givers of the healing balm of forgiveness. Help us to not only know about but truly experience the intensity of your love, grace and mercy through the act of forgiveness and its transforming power.

Praise the Lord, o my soul, all my in most being praise you for in you is healing and redemption!
Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

L: Friends, in the scriptures, "Seven" is often seen as a perfect number, a mystical number, a number that points to infinity. So when Jesus tells his disciples to forgive "seventy times seven", (or "seventy-seven times" depending on translation), he is inviting people into a never ending, expansive dance of grace.

Confession, repentance, turning one's life around to a transformed future; Forgiveness, resilience, opening one's life to a new moment in relationship: all this may seem impossible, and yet Jesus calls us to

profound, ever-evolving change.

Let's take a few moments to ponder our lives, personal, and in wider community.
Where do we need forgiveness? Where do we need to forgive?

Where do our lives intersect in the wider community with structures, practices, attitudes that deeply hurt our neighbors? Where must we seek forgiveness? Where must we seek to effect change?

How have we been wounded with structures, practices, attitudes of the wider community that need transformation? How may we begin to forgive?

Silence

ASSURANCE OF MERCY & GRACE: ☺*

L: Holy One, You call us into this ever expanding dance of grace; Turning “seventy times seven” is not too much when we follow your lead into a future of hope and peace. God does not ask us to do what God has not already done for us. Embracing God's forgiveness in both giving and receiving leads us to a new and better way of life.

All: Glory be to the One who, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Amen.

A TIME OF PRAYER –
LIFTING UP PRAYER REQUESTS –
THE LORD'S PRAYER:

INVITATION TO OFFERING: ☺*

L: Like Paul, who was showered with an abundance of mercy from God, we too have been blessed. Like Paul, we are called to go forth and witness to the presence of Christ in our lives in so many diverse ways. Guided by the Spirit, let us consider what it is we will freely offer to God so that we may joyously participate with God in providing for the needs of God's people and all of God's creation. In our giving may God's light that is planted within, shine forth from our lives.

HYMN OF DEDICATION: #470 v. 4 “*God Is Here as We Your People*”

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PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

L: We dedicate to you, generous God, our lives and our gifts.

All: May all that we have to offer be put to use guided by your wisdom and Holy Spirit so that they may truly be a source of your blessing into all the world. Amen.

SUMM-IT UP!

SENDING SONG: “*Freely, Freely*”

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CHARGE & BENEDECTION

POSTLUDE: “*GO NOW IN PEACE*”

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