

**The Fifth Sunday in Apostles' Tide, July 24, 2022**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

**Forgive Us . . . For We Forgive**

Luke 11:1–13

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*


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Our text is the Gospel reading from Luke 11: **Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of his disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.” And He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation”** (vv 1–4). Our focus is especially on the petition about forgiveness: **“Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us”** (v 4).

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The first thing to talk about is this:

You probably noticed a few things missing from the Lord’s Prayer in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus teaches His disciples to pray

both in the Gospel of Matthew and in the Gospel of Luke  
and the words are slightly different.

It’s a beautiful thing when we pray the Lord’s Prayer together  
with the words given to us by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel.

Here in Luke we also learn that we can pray with similar or related words as well.

Now when we hear Lord’s Prayer,

there are two places in the Lord’s Prayer where people tend to get heartburn.

They are the fifth and sixth petitions—

Forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive those who trespass against us, *and*  
Lead us not into temptation.

Today we leave aside the temptation part

and take up the prayer for forgiveness— what we call the fifth petition.

Now it’s no surprise that we sometimes struggle to pray these words.

At face value, it sounds like our being forgiven depends

on whether we forgive others  
or maybe on how well we forgive them.

That little word “as”

—forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive those who trespass against us.

Which raises the question:

What happens to someone who is a Christian  
but struggles to forgive . . . or can't forgive?

The place to begin is this:

Forgiveness is never easy. Never.

You know this, and so do I.

Forgiveness is never easy, and it's never cheap.

There's a cost to it.

It's painful, sometimes excruciatingly painful.

For example:

If someone owes me fifty bucks and I cancel that debt,

I don't get that money back.

I'm out fifty bucks—a dinner out or a new pair of jeans.

If someone gossips about me and slanders my reputation,

and I forgive them,

that doesn't restore my reputation.

It may not even change how people who heard those things think about me.

And if, God forbid, someone were to harm one of my children,

and I forgive that person,

my child doesn't become whole and unharmed.

Forgiveness doesn't undo physical and emotional scars.

And to forgive someone certainly isn't the same

as saying that what was done is no big deal.

Sometimes that's how we think of it—forgiveness means *no big deal*.

That's not what forgiveness means.

And forgiveness doesn't mean that we're pretending like everything's fine.

What I mean is that forgiveness doesn't put things in reverse.

It isn't like pressing rewind and going back to the beginning.

Life isn't a video game where we can start over when we mess up

or when someone else messes it up for us.

Just ask your Lord.

The very One who taught us to pray these words.  
Who taught us to say,  
    “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”  
He gave us this prayer—He gave us these very words—  
    while He was on His way to a cross outside Jerusalem.  
And why was His face set toward that cross?  
For the forgiveness of sins—yours, mine, the world’s,  
    and that guy who sinned against you.

So you don’t need to tell Jesus about how hard forgiveness is,  
    how challenging it is to forgive someone.  
You don’t need to tell Him about how it doesn’t come easily or cheaply,  
    And that it requires a cost and great pain.  
You can tell Him those things, but He already knows.  
He was crucified.  
That’s what forgiveness cost Jesus.  
    It’s not just His wallet or His reputation that took the hit.  
    It was His body and life . . . to the very last breath.  
And no, forgiving sins doesn’t take away His scars.  
Our forgiveness is what gave Him scarred hands and side.

So don’t think that forgiveness is such an easy thing for God  
    and such a hard thing for you.  
That’s a mistake we sometimes make.  
Oh the “forgive us our trespasses” part—that’s really easy for God.  
But the “as we forgive those who trespass against us” —that’s hard.  
Well, God didn’t wave a magic wand to deal with sin.  
God sent His Son to die, His only Son.  
Which is *way* more than any of us have done.

In other words,  
    when we pray “Forgive us our trespasses,”  
        it’s the same as saying to God, “Crucify Your Son for me.”  
And when we add, “As we forgive those who trespass against us,”  
    it’s like Him saying back to us, “I crucified My Son for *them* also.”

Your Lord paid for both sides of the equation.  
He paid for your sins and He paid for their sins,  
    whoever *they* happen to be.

Those who trespass against us.  
And just who is that?  
Who are *you* praying for when you pray these words?  
I mean it—really people and faces and places and times.  
Whose sins have you been holding on to,  
    storing up in your body or mind,  
    counting and keeping track of?  
Even those who like numbers find keeping track of other people’s sins to be tedious.  
We do it anyway.  
Is it your father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, coworker?  
Would you like Christ to come down from the cross  
    and put them up there instead?  
Make them suffer, bleed, and die for what they’ve said or done?

God knows they deserve it.  
And so do I.

Too often we act as if our sin is no big deal, but *hers! his!* why, they’re the worst ever.  
Yes, there’s no denying it, their sins are bad.  
And so are mine.

Think about it.  
Isn’t that why we pray the Lord’s Prayer so often?  
I mean, we pray it most days, sometimes multiple times a day,  
    and every Sunday for sure.  
“Forgive us our trespasses” —over and over and over again.  
Why ask for God to forgive us our sins so often?  
Isn’t that a bit much?  
We’re not that bad, are we?  
Yes, we are.  
Because that’s how often we sin!  
We sin daily and much and surely deserve nothing but punishment.  
That’s how Martin Luther explains the Fifth Petition in the Small Catechism.  
Maybe it sounds harsh, but it’s true.  
And we’re saying that not only about our neighbors who sinned against us.  
We’re saying it about ourselves.

And what would happen if God chose to look at and remember our sins  
    instead of forgiving them?  
What would happen to our prayers?

If He were to hold on to just one sin of ours, even one small sin,  
and say that that one hasn't been paid for by Christ?  
If He were looking at our sins,  
then He wouldn't give us anything that we pray for.  
He would deny our prayers.  
If He didn't forgive our sins for Christ's sake, then  
He wouldn't make His name holy among us.  
His kingdom wouldn't come to us.  
He wouldn't break or hinder every evil plan and purpose  
of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.  
He wouldn't even give us our daily bread, if He was looking at our sins.  
He wouldn't protect us in temptation  
or deliver us from the evil one, all his works, and all his ways.

Forgive us our trespasses.  
Every single day.  
And that's how often I need His help in forgiving others, too.  
I need His help daily and much to forgive the sins of others,  
just as I need daily and much the forgiveness He shows me.

And you know there's also a cost to not forgiving.  
I'm sure you do.  
To hold on to other's sins costs us something.  
It costs us peace and joy.  
It costs us sleep and contentment.  
It leads to bitterness, resentment, and grudges—  
it's like a poison that ruins everything.  
When we refuse to forgive others, it poisons even the good things God gives us.

Is that a cost you really want to pay?

So what are we praying in this petition?  
We're praying for our forgiveness to match His forgiveness.  
We're not saying that God will never forgive me until I forgive others.  
That would be like Jesus showing up to the paralytic  
and before He says, "Your sins are forgiven,"  
asking Him, "Have you forgiven everyone else?"

When the sinful woman comes and bathes His feet with ointment,  
and He says, “Your sins are forgiven,”  
it would be like Him stopping and saying,  
“Wait, let me first make sure you’ve forgiven everyone else.”

It’s not like that.

It’s not like Jesus says, “Well, I’ll match your forgiveness.”

His forgiveness is greater than ours could ever be.

We’re praying that our forgiveness of others would match His forgiveness of us.

We’re praying that He would forgive our sins and give us forgiving spirits.

We’re praying that He would set His forgiveness baking in our hearts,  
so that it’s ready to be extended and granted  
as soon as the offender asks for it.

We’re asking our dear Father in heaven to make us like the father of the prodigal son—  
ready to run to that person with arms open and full forgiveness.

Are you there yet?

Maybe.

Maybe not.

That’s why we pray this prayer.

Jesus isn’t saying, “Once you’ve got forgiveness straightened out in your life,  
then come to Me.”

He’s saying, “I’m here for you now,  
and I’ll straighten out the forgiveness in your life as well.”

We’re asking for His help in the Lord’s Prayer  
because we know that forgiveness is hard.

We can’t say “Forgive us our trespasses” while saying, “But don’t forgive *that person*.”  
But I know we sometimes feel it.

We sometimes think it.

Forgive us.

Forgive *us*.

Often we’re thinking only of ourselves and our own sins,  
but we don’t say just “forgive me.”

We say, “Forgive us.”

Who’s the *us*?

Forgive me and the one who has sinned against me.

Forgive me and my father, my mother.

Forgive me and my brother, my sister.

Forgive me and my son, my daughter.

Jesus told us to ask and it would be given.

He said to seek and we will find,  
to knock and it will be opened.

This isn't a blank check for physical goods in this life.

But if we apply it to this situation, it's a beautiful thing.

So ask for forgiveness, and it will be given.

Knock on the door of forgiveness and it will be opened to you.

Seek for forgiveness and you will find it.

Not apart from Christ, but in Him.

So if you're lacking forgiveness, then you've come to the right place.

If you say,

"Are my sins really forgiven because I have a hard time forgiving *that* person."

If you struggle to forgive, then you've come to the right place.

Because when your friend shows up to you asking for forgiveness,

and you can't find any in your cupboard, it's bare,

then come knock on the heavenly Father's door.

He's got lots and plenty to spare.

Receive the absolution.

Take and eat, take and drink—for the forgiveness of sins.

I want to add a practical word.

What's it like to ask and give forgiveness in a relationship?

In a home, a family, a marriage, whatever it might be.

This is how I picture it:

You have the one who has sinned and the one who is sinned against.

The one who has sinned says, "Please forgive me in Jesus' name."

Which is like saying, "Please see the crucifix between us.

My sin deserved that—to be crucified—but see my sin on Jesus."

And when the other person says, "I forgive you,"

it's not saying, "No big deal."

It's saying, "I acknowledge that your sin deserved that,

but I'm gonna see your sin on Jesus.

Someone had to die for your sins,

but thank God it was Him."

So when you have a need to confess to someone else,

or to forgive someone else,

take the crucifix down from your wall and hold it between you,

see your sins and their sins there on Christ.  
And let the sin die there with Him.

If you look inside your own heart to forgive the one who sinned against you,  
I suspect you won't find enough forgiveness.  
Look to the cross.  
Cling to Jesus.  
Look to the forgiveness that comes from Him and is worked in us by the Holy Spirit.

But I can't forgive, you still say.  
"I'll never forgive."  
"I don't feel forgiving toward them."

"What more do you want," Jesus asks?  
"What more?" with His swollen eye and bruised face,  
the blood streaming down His face,  
the holes in His hands.

I can't forgive, you say.

I can, He says.  
And I do.  
And He's not waiting for you.  
He's already paid the full price for you and for your neighbor.  
You are forgiven, Christ says.  
And His forgiveness is enough.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ  
Jesus.

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*Phil 4:7*