

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKY
17 September The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

HYMNS: 263 119 376 24 verse 6

INTROIT: Psalm 103:1-12

Bless the LORD, O my soul and, all my inmost being, bless His holy name!

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all His benefits!

He forgives all your iniquities. He heals all your diseases.

He redeems your life from the pit. He crowns you with mercy and compassion.

He satisfies what adorns you with good things, so that you renew your youth like the eagle.

The LORD carries out acts of righteousness and of justice for all who are oppressed.

He has made known His Ways to Moses, His deeds to the people of Israel.

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to become angry and abounding in mercy.

He will not always accuse and will not keep on being angry for ever.

He has not treated us as our sins deserve and has not paid us back according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

COLLECT: O Lord Jesus, let Your abiding mercy cleanse and defend Your church. Because we cannot continue safely without Your grace, preserve us continually by Your goodness and strength, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Welcome to all worshipping with us!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaalc@gmail.com.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

READINGS:

Genesis 50:15-21 Joseph reassures his brothers.

Romans 14:1-12 Respecting the conscientious scruples of a weaker brother.

Matthew 18:21-35 The parable of the unforgiving servant.

Genesis 50:15-21

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers realised that their father was dead, they asked, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and actually pays us back for all the evil that we have done to him?"

¹⁶ They sent a messenger to Joseph to say: "Before your father died, he left these instructions, ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to tell Joseph: "We are begging you, please forgive the crime and the sin that your brothers committed against you, because they did evil to you!"' So now, please, forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father!"

Joseph wept when their message came to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers themselves came and threw themselves down before him. They said, "See! We are your slaves."

¹⁹ However, Joseph told them: "Do not be afraid! For am I in the place of God?"

²⁰ Although you planned evil against me, God has planned good to come from it, to accomplish what is so this day, the preservation of the lives of many people.

²¹ So now, do not be afraid! I shall provide for you and your little ones."

He reassured them with words that touched their hearts.

Romans 14:1-12

¹ Welcome the person who is weak in the faith but not that you may get into quarrels about opinions! ² One person believes he may eat anything, but another person, who is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The person who eats should not despise the person who does not eat, and the person who does not eat should not criticise the person who eats! For God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to criticise someone else's servant? It is with reference to his own master that he succeeds or fails. He will also succeed. For the Lord can make him succeed.

⁵ For one person thinks that one day is better than another is, and another person thinks that every day is alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind! ⁶ The person who observes the day observes it to the Lord. The person who eats eats to the Lord. For he gives thanks to God. The person who does not eat refrains from eating to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸ For, if we live, we live to the Lord;

and, if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For Christ died and became alive again for this purpose: that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ However, why do you criticise your fellow-Christian? Or why do you too despise your fellow-Christian? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For Scripture has said: “**As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before Me, and every tongue will make confession to God.’**” ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Matthew 18:21-35

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked Him, “Lord, how often shall I forgive my brother when he keeps sinning against me? Up to seven times?”

²² Jesus answered him, “I tell you, not up to seven times but up to seventy times seven.

²³ “That is why the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he had begun to settle accounts, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since this slave could not pay the debt, the master ordered that he should be sold, with his wife, children and all that he had, and that payment should be made. ²⁶ Therefore, the slave fell on his knees, bowed low before him and asked: ‘Be patient with me! I shall pay everything back to you.’ ²⁷ The master of that slave felt compassion for him, freed him and forgave him his debt.

²⁸ “However, when that slave had gone out, he found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii. He took hold of him and began to choke him. He said, ‘Pay what you owe!’ ²⁹ Therefore, his fellow slave fell and begged him, ‘Be patient with me! I shall pay you back.’ ³⁰ However, he refused. Instead, he went off and put him into prison until he should pay back what he owed.

³¹ Therefore, when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were very sad and went and told their own master everything that had happened. ³² Then his master sent for him and said to him: ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³ Should you not also have pitied your fellow slave as I had also pitied you?’ ³⁴ His master was angry and handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back all that he owed.

³⁵ “That is also what My Father in heaven will do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart.”

THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SLAVE
Sermon for the Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, 2023
Matthew 18:21-35

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel read before, Matthew 18:21-35.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Forgiveness doesn't count. By this, we mean that *it doesn't keep score or keep track of how many times it has to forgive or how much sin it has to have mercy on.* That's the way it is with God toward us, and that's the way it is with us toward one another. God forgives us freely, fully, completely. In his explanation of the fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "*And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,*" Luther writes in the *Large Catechism*, "Just as we daily sin much against God, and yet He forgives everything through grace, so we, too, must ever forgive our neighbour who does us injury, violence, and wrong, shows malice toward us, and so on. If, therefore, you do not forgive, then do not think that God forgives you" (LC III 94-95). We are to forgive one another freely, fully, and completely, not counting or keeping score or keeping track. That's the connection Jesus draws for us today in the parable of the unmerciful slave.

As we heard last week, Jesus had been teaching His disciples about the seriousness of sin and how we are to treat it as such and advised on how to deal with a brother who sins against us and to seek to regain that brother. This now prompted a question from Peter: "**Lord, how often shall I forgive my brother when he keeps sinning against me? Up to seven times?**"

Peter understood that Jesus wants us to forgive those who sin against us, but he supposed there must be a limit to forgiving. He wanted to keep score. He may think he sounded generous, suggesting what seemed to him like a lot of times to show forgiveness. "*Seven times! Aren't I being merciful, Jesus? I'm willing to go up to seven whole times!*"

But Jesus ups the ante: "**I tell you, not up to seven times but up to seventy times seven.**" Seventy times seven, which is 490, is a number that is not to be taken literally. It is just a way of saying to *keep on forgiving indefinitely.* Don't keep score

and finally decide that enough is enough. If God were to keep such a record of our sins¹, He would have written us off long ago. We need God's forgiveness over and over every day as long as we live. Jesus says that, in effect, there can be no limit to the forgiveness given and received between those who are His disciples. Forgiveness doesn't count.

To drive home the point, Jesus tells what we commonly call the Parable of the Unmerciful Slave. You know the story, but let me paraphrase it a bit.

There's a slave who owes his king a lot of money. Ten thousand talents, to be exact. That was an extraordinary amount of debt. Today, we could say that he owed millions to the king. It was a huge debt. Now, the king is going to foreclose on the slave and call in the debt. The slave is hauled in, set before the king, and told to pay up. The slave is shaking in his boots because he knows he has no means to pay off this enormous debt, and he knows what the king could do to him.

But this king doesn't do what he could do to the slave. He doesn't throw him into prison as is his right. No. Instead, he has pity on him. The master has mercy on his slave, forgives him of his huge debt and releases him.

So now the slave is free. He has learned a powerful lesson about mercy and forgiveness. Or has he? Apparently not, because the first thing he does with his freedom is to go out and find a fellow slave who owes him a little bit of money. It's a tiny amount in comparison to what he owed the king. But this slave, who his master had forgiven such a huge amount, will not show even a tiny fraction of that mercy toward his fellow slave. **"He took hold of him and began to choke him. He said, 'Pay what you owe!'"** He showed no pity toward the man who owed him a measly few dollars, and he had him thrown in prison. The unmerciful slave has not learned how forgiveness works in this kingdom. He shows that he does not want to operate based on mercy but on the old way of accounting, scorekeeping, payback, and revenge. Sadly, he has rejected the ways of his king.

The king finds out and says to the man: **"You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.³³ Should you not also have pitied your fellow slave as I had also pitied you?"³⁴ His master was angry and handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back all that he owed.** And then Jesus puts the punch-line warning on the parable. He tells us, **"That is also what My Father in heaven will do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart."**

¹ Psalm 130:1

The meaning is plain and clear: Forgiveness is how it works in the kingdom of heaven. If you want to operate on some other basis, you would be in a heap of trouble if you're intent on scorekeeping and payback. That's not how your heavenly Father has dealt with you. So *why do you act that way toward your fellow forgiven sinner?* God has forgiven that other person, just as He has forgiven you. Then why would you act as though you are greater than God? To not forgive is really to set yourself up as an idol. You think you're greater than God. God forgave that person, but you think you ought not to have to. Who are you not to forgive someone whom God has already forgiven? Who are you not to forgive someone else when you have had all your sins forgiven by God? You see, unforgiveness is a matter of idolatry and ingratitude. It is to reject the ways of God's kingdom.

For all our unforgiveness, we ask God to forgive us. We ask Him to create new hearts in us that reflect on the mercy He has shown toward us. We ask Him to help us forgive that other person who may very well have wronged us. The Lord does not keep a scorecard, and neither should we. "O Lord. Help us to forgive, even as we have been forgiven!"

Jesus teaches us the importance of forgiveness over and over again in the Gospels. It is an important matter in His sight, and He must realise how slow of heart we are to "get it." Mercy toward sinners and love toward one another are major themes in Jesus' teaching to His disciples.

Forgiveness has to do with the death of Jesus Christ for sinners. He not only died for me and you but also for that brother who sinned against you, that person you don't like because he did you wrong. But then sometimes I'm the clown who does wrong to somebody else. Now, magnify that offence by a tremendous amount, and you may begin to come close to measuring the offence you and I have committed toward God, thumbing our nose at the God who created us and loves us so much. So we're all in the same boat here. And we'd all be up a creek without a paddle if it were not for the unfathomable mercy our King and Master has shown toward every one of us. ***Forgiveness is the way of the kingdom. There is no other way.***

Whether in a congregation or a household, we need forgiveness to live together as a family. The more time you spend together, the closer you are, the more opportunities there are to hurt one another. So, we need to be able to forgive one another so we may live in harmony. We constantly need the help of God the Father to forgive, as He has forgiven each of us fully and freely, for Christ's sake.

As we look to the cross of Christ, we see the great mercy God has shown us, sending His only Son to take all of our sins, the whole enormous debt - and to die for them in our place, paying the unpayable debt we owed. His holy blood is of infinite value because He is the eternal Son of God. At the foot of the cross is where

we learn forgiveness. In Holy Baptism, God has washed away all our sins and made us His children to reflect His character. In Holy Absolution, time and time again, God continues to forgive. And in the Lord's Supper, we receive Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is where it's at. It's the standard operating procedure in the kingdom of God. And with this forgiveness, we also receive what it leads to: the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. "*For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.*"

In one of his sermons on our text today, Martin Luther sums up the parable's point like this: "Should we then bite and scratch each other like dogs and cats? No, but we should heartily forgive and ask: [Why] should I accuse my brother? If God is merciful unto me and for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ forgives me so great a debt, why should I make so much ado about a penny or two? I will call it square, forgive and forget, and thank God that He has forgiven me and made me a partaker of His grace."

Dear friends, God does not count our trespasses against us. Forgiveness doesn't count. It doesn't count or, keep score or keep track. It doesn't measure how big the debt is that we're forgiving. *Forgiveness forgives.* It's like that with God toward us. God has forgiven our huge mountain of debt because of what Christ did for us on the cross. And God keeps on forgiving us, time after time after time, when we sin against Him. Forgiveness doesn't count. And forgiveness is our way of life, literally. Because of God's forgiveness and love toward us, we have life, new life, eternal life. And in this life that we share, we then forgive one another. That's how it goes in God's kingdom. Forgiveness doesn't count. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Heavenly Father, we worship You as the creator of all things and the preserver of our lives. In Your goodness You care for every one of Your creatures. We come before You in prayer with sincere and trusting hearts.

We thank and praise You for all Your goodness, but especially for the gift of Your only Son Jesus, whom You sent to suffer and die to rescue us from sin, and to rise again to guarantee the final crown of life for us in heaven. Through Him, we are Your children, enjoying the fullness of Your goodness and care. Give us firm faith in Your power and guidance, that we may continually trust You for all our daily needs, and carry out our daily tasks without worry about the future. No matter what may happen, give us the conviction that You direct all things in heaven and on earth by Your Word, and care especially for Your children.

Grant us Your grace that we may not live for the worthless values of this world or for the accumulation of wealth. We thank You for Jesus Christ, our most priceless treasure. Teach us to seek above everything else the blessings of Your kingdom in a life of loving obedience.

Make Christ's Word in all its richness live in our hearts and make us wise. Increase our love toward all people. Give us a special concern for those of the family of faith, and make us eager to help one another with our burdens and weaknesses. Fill Your Church with Your Spirit, that the compassion of Christ may be evident in the love and kindness we show to the fallen, the erring, and the heavy-laden. Let us never grow tired of doing good.

Grant that we, whose ears have been opened spiritually to hear Your Gospel, may speak it plainly to those who should hear it from us. Let Your light shine among the nations, so that the very ends of the earth may see Your glory, and people everywhere may learn to worship and serve You alone.

Bless our own country. May those in positions of government and authority honour You. May Your truth hold sway in politics, business, industry, education, and the mass media.

In every day's needs and crises, help all families with Your presence. Be with them in sorrow or joy, sickness or health, disappointment or success, and make them safe and content in Your love.

Continue to direct our lives in your loving providence. Give us opportunities to use your gifts as Your grateful stewards. Keep us in the faith by Your grace and power, that we may attain to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Article When You Are Faithless, Christ Is Your Faithfulness

Faith, as a subjective experience, is forever in flux. Sometimes it feels like "God's in His heaven; all's right with the world." Some Christians go on like this for days at a time, even weeks on end, with nary a twinge of uncertainty or doubt. But that's not the norm. It's unrealistic to assume your faith should constantly seem strong and resilient; by its very nature, faith usually is mingled with doubt. That's because your faith differs from knowledge that you acquired by logical deduction. Though God uses word, water, bread and wine to connect with us, ultimately, faith itself is rooted not in tangible things but in invisible ones. It is "*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11:1).

For as long as we live, you and I will experience ups and downs in our life of faith. We can be at the top of our game at one moment and down in the depths in the next. Human emotions are like that, as you well know. Any number of things going on in a given moment, even the phases of the moon or atmospheric conditions, can impact our mood (I often get a headache when there is a change in the weather, and I don't feel too happy about that!) Faith isn't an emotion. True, as we reflect on faith, it can often seem like a feeling. But faith is far more: Faith is the hand that grasps the promises of God. Faith is trust - faith is reliance on God and His word. It's a two-party arrangement, a mutual bond, and while God remains steady and firm, we often falter.

You can certainly see this dynamic playing out in the history of Israel and their faith. God chose their ancestral father Abraham, pledging to make of his descendants a great nation from which would come the Redeemer He had first promised in Eden. Through the centuries, He repeatedly renewed His covenant relationship with them, promising to be their God over and over again. And in turn, generation after generation of Israelites promised to be His people.

Most strikingly of all, after their long bondage in Egypt, God delivered his people dramatically and miraculously from the swift chariots of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, leading them safely through the waters on dry ground and bringing them to the sacred mountain of Sinai. There, He personally appeared to Moses and the elders of Israel, renewing the covenant He first gave to Abraham and vowing once again to give them His gracious blessing and merciful hand to guide them. At Sinai, God spoke to His people through His prophet Moses, giving them His Law to bind them to Himself, and with one voice the people of Israel responded: "*All that the LORD has spoken we shall do*" (Exodus 19:8).

But what did the people actually do?

Even a casual review of the history of God's covenant people shows how fickle they were in their relationship with Him. Repeatedly they turned to other gods instead of the Lord, who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt and delivered them with His mighty hand and outstretched arm. Repeatedly they broke His commands. Repeatedly they embraced the idolatrous, adulterous ways of the pagan nations among whom they lived.

You may think that their faithfulness would improve when God entered human history in person, born in human flesh. But no. The pattern of ancient Israel carries through in the church in the New Testament. While Jesus deliberately hand-picked His twelve disciples to found a new Israel, their faith faltered as well.

On the night in which He was betrayed, after the Last Supper, Jesus informed His disciples that they would all fall away when He was betrayed to his executioners.

Peter objected: “*Even if I must die with You, I shall not deny You!*” (Matthew 26:35). The other disciples said the same. Of course, before that night was over, Peter denied that he had ever known Jesus. The very next day at Golgotha, the whole crowd of disciples - with the exception of John, Jesus’ mother, Mary Magdalene, and Mary of Cleopas – abandoned Jesus to die the agonising, despicably shameful death of crucifixion.

I think I can understand Peter and his friends. At times, I’m utterly convinced that I can suffer anything - even death - and not depart from Jesus. At other times, I’m not so sure. Judging by my words and actions, the sad reality is that, like Peter, I repeatedly have denied the Lord who has bought me with His blood. Over and over again I have failed to live according to the commandments of God’s Law. Not only have I done things God forbids, but just as grievously, I have not done the things He commands.

I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. My Lord’s name I have not honoured as I should; my worship and prayers have faltered. I have not let His love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed. There are those whom I have hurt and those I have failed to help. My thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin.

I suspect that it’s much the same for you. But my point is not that you and I are sinners. Rather, I want to highlight what should be obvious but what we so often forget: our faith fluctuates from day to day. As a subjective, felt experience, it’s on again, off again. Hot and cold, strong and weak, sturdy and frail.

But faith does not hinge on our feelings. It is rooted firmly in the promises of God. When “*we are faithless, He remains faithful - for He cannot deny Himself*” (2 Timothy 2:13).

When calamity strikes, you can count on God - not because you feel close to Him, but because He remains close to you, in His Word, for Jesus’ sake. In the midst of the uncertainties of your life you needn’t wonder about His feelings or attitude toward you. Though your faith may fluctuate, His promises never waver: “*all the promises of God find their yes*” in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20).

In life’s tight spots, focus not on your faith, but on God’s faithfulness. Look not at your promises to Him, but His loving promises to you in His Son. Rest assured, those promises include your name. Then, freed from the continual teeter-totter of faith’s emotional roller coaster, you can confidently utter your hearty “Amen” to God’s eternal glory.

Children's Message:

Why do you forgive someone who did something mean to you? Should you forgive them? But forgiving someone who did something mean to you isn't easy. Usually, we think about getting even! My brother broke my toy, so I'm going to break one of his toys! My sister called me a bad name, so I'm going to call her one! Other times, we want the person who was mean to us to sweat - to worry about what we shall do to them and when we shall do it.

In our First Reading today from the Old Testament (Genesis 50:15-21), this is what Joseph's brothers think he's doing. They've done some very bad things to Joseph in the past; they even thought about killing him. Instead, they sold him into slavery, and he ended



up as a slave in Egypt. That's pretty bad! Now, around twenty years later, they're worried Joseph is going to get even with them. They think the reason he's waited is because their father was protecting them from Joseph, but now their father has died, and they believe Joseph is going to get even. They've worried and suffered all this time, but now the day has come.

Have you ever wanted to get even with someone but knew you'd get in big trouble if your parents found out? That's what the brothers of Joseph think Joseph is doing - waiting for Dad to die so he can get even! But guess what? Joseph wasn't thinking like that at all. He forgave his brothers for all the bad things they did to him. He even said that God let it happen so God could use Joseph to save people, even his brothers, who were mean to him. Joseph said it was all up to God! How could Joseph be that way?

Think about this: How can you forgive someone who's been bad to you? Maybe we should ask the question this way: How can God forgive us when we're bad? Remember how? He sent Jesus! Jesus went to the cross and died for all our sins. God loves us and forgives us because of Jesus! And now that you're God's children, you can forgive one another as Jesus first forgave you. It's still hard to forgive, but it is possible when we think about what Jesus did for us and how He's forgiven us. We can forgive others because Jesus forgave us first. *Thank You, Jesus, for forgiving me. Help to forgive others. Amen.*

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

| 24 September 17 Pentecost | 1 October 18 Pentecost | 8 October 19 Pentecost |
|--|---|--|
| 8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR | 8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD LR | 8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC |
| Sunday, 24 September | | |
| READINGS: Isaiah 55:6-9; Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30; Matthew 20:1-16 | | |
| HYMNS: 426 324 346 (79 839) 379 | | |
| Sunday, 1 October | | |
| READINGS: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32; Philippians 2:1-18; Matthew 21:23-27 | | |
| HYMNS: 358 197 357 113 | | |

September Bible Studies:

Marburg, today, after service.

Lowood: Thursday, 21st, 10.00am at Lowood.

Aubigny/Oakey: Friday, 22nd 7.30pm at Oakey .

Pastor will be away from 25 September - 1 October. If there are any emergencies during this time, contact an elder.