

Morning Prayer
15th Sunday after Pentecost

September 13, 2020

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Matthew 18:21-22

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Morning Prayer for Proper 19

Opening Sentence

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. *Phillipian-1:2*

The Invitatory and Psalter

V: Lord, open our lips.

R: And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Alleluia

Venite *Psalms 95:1-7*

Come, let us sing to the Lord; *
let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving *
and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.

For the Lord is a great God, *
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the caverns of the earth, *
and the heights of the hills are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it, *
and his hands have molded the dry land.

Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, *
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. *
Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

The Psalm or Psalms Appointed

Psalm 24 *Domini est terra*

- 1 The earth is the LORD'S and all that is in it, *
the world and all who dwell therein.
- 2 For it is he who founded it upon the seas *
and made it firm upon the rivers of the deep.
- 3 Who can ascend the hill of the LORD? *
and who can stand in his holy place?
- 4 Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, *
who have not pledged themselves to falsehood, nor sworn by what is a fraud.
- 5 They shall receive a blessing from the LORD *
and a just reward from the God of their salvation."
- 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, *
of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.
- 7 Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them high, O everlasting doors; *
and the King of glory shall come in.
- 8 Who is this King of glory? *
"The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle."
- 9 Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them high, O everlasting doors; *
and the King of glory shall come in.
- 10 Who is he, this King of glory? *
"The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory."

Psalm 29 *Afferte Domino*

- 1 Ascribe to the LORD, you gods, *
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his Name; *
worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.
- 3 The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders; *
the LORD is upon the mighty waters.
- 4 The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice; *
the voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.
- 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedar trees; *
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
- 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, *
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the LORD splits the flames of fire; the voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; *
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- 8 The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe *
and strips the forests bare.

9 And in the temple of the LORD *

all are crying, "Glory!"

10 The LORD sits enthroned above the flood; *

the LORD sits enthroned as King for evermore.

11 The LORD shall give strength to his people; *

the LORD shall give his people the blessing of peace.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

The Lessons

Old Testament:

Exodus 14:19-31

19 The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. 20It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. 22The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. 23The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. 24At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. 25He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.'

26 Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.' 27So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. 28The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. 29But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

30 Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Here ends the Reading.

Psalm:

Psalm 114

¹ Hallelujah!

When Israel came out of Egypt, *
the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech,

² Judah became God's sanctuary *
and Israel his dominion.

³ The sea beheld it and fled; *
Jordan turned and went back.

⁴ The mountains skipped like rams, *
and the little hills like young sheep.

⁵ What ailed you, O sea, that you fled? *
O Jordan, that you turned back?

⁶ You mountains, that you skipped like rams? *
you little hills like young sheep?

⁷ Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, *
at the presence of the God of Jacob,

⁸ Who turned the hard rock into a pool of water *
and flint-stone into a flowing spring.

Epistle:

Romans 14:1-12

¹ Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. ² Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³ Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶ Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷ We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸ 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. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.'

¹² So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Here ends the Reading.

You are God *Te Deum laudamus*

You are God: we praise you;
You are the Lord; we acclaim you;
You are the eternal Father:
All creation worships you.
To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,
Cherubim and Seraphim, sing in endless praise:
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
The glorious company of apostles praise you.
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.
Throughout the world the holy Church acclaims you;
Father, of majesty unbounded,
your true and only Son, worthy of all worship,
and the Holy Spirit, advocate and guide.

You, Christ, are the king of glory,
the eternal Son of the Father.
When you became man to set us free
you did not shun the Virgin's womb.
You overcame the sting of death
and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
You are seated at God's right hand in glory.
We believe that you will come and be our judge.
Come then, Lord, and help your people,
bought with the price of your own blood,
and bring us with your saints
to glory everlasting.

Gospel:

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' 22 Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

23 'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." 27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released

him and forgave him the debt. 28But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." 29Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." 30But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. 31When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" 34And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. 35So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God

A Reflection

[RCL]: Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20 The Ocean and Beloved

Forgiveness

The Rev. Joseph S. Pagano

Have you ever heard this warning: Be careful what you pray for – you might get it. Watch out – you just might get what you are after. Here's a prayer many of us pray at least once a week – *forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Is that what we really want? We know we want God's forgiveness. Of that, we are quite sure. However, we are not so sure about the second part, about the way we forgive others. We know that we are not nearly so quick to forgive others as we hope and pray that God forgives us. The Psalmist says, "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness." Great news. We mess up. We ask God for forgiveness. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, and so God forgives us. But... when someone does us wrong when someone does us dirty, we say, "not so fast." We are *not* so full of compassion and mercy. We are *not* so slow to anger and of great kindness. We may be quick to anger and full of... colorful language.

And yet, this is how Our Lord taught us to pray – *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* Be careful what you pray for – you just might get it.

In our Gospel lesson, Peter comes to Jesus and asks, "Lord, if someone sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

Peter always asks the questions that we would like to ask. He is so earnest and so eager to do the right thing. But Peter also always seems to be getting it wrong. Maybe it's this fallible humanity that makes

Peter an exemplar for us. He had heard Jesus talk about forgiveness, so he wants to know more. And Peter must have done his homework, too. There is an ancient rabbinic tradition that says a person should forgive another who has sinned against him as many as four times. So, Peter, earnest and eager, tries to be even more extravagant than the rabbis, and he adds three more times. He asks, "Should I forgive a person even up to seven times?"

Seven times is a lot. It's three more than the rabbis. It is a lot of times to turn and forgive someone who has sinned against you. Perhaps Peter was expecting Jesus to praise him for even suggesting such extravagant forgiveness. Perhaps Peter was hoping for a pat on the back, a gold star for the day, for an A+ on his forgiveness exam.

This doesn't happen. Rather, Jesus turns and says, "No, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." New Testament scholars debate whether the Greek text means "seventy-seven times" or "seventy times seven times." But that is beside the point, because either way, Jesus is holding up an enormous number, a number so big that we can't begin to calculate it in terms of forgiveness. Peter wants a rule, a measurement, so he holds wide his hands and says, "This much, Lord? Should I forgive even this much?" And Jesus says, "No, much more than that. You're not even using the right scale. As far as the east is from the west, that's how much you should forgive." It's such an enormous amount of forgiveness, it would be senseless to try to calculate how much or how often.

There has been a fair amount of social science research on forgiveness of late. It turns out that forgiveness is good for you. People who forgive have lower levels of anger, anxiety, and depression, are more agreeable and emotionally stable, and may also have gained some health benefits. Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman in their book *Character Strengths and Virtues* list forgiveness as one of twenty-four character strengths that make for a good life and that contribute to human wellbeing. It's good to know that there is some social scientific evidence that supports the claim that forgiveness is good for us, even though I'm not too sure that was Jesus' point.

One instrument designed to assess our forgiving character is known as the "Forgiveness Likelihood Scale". It gives ten scenarios of wrongdoing and then asks participants to indicate their likelihood to forgive on a scale from very unlikely to very likely. Here are a few of the items:

You share something embarrassing about yourself to a friend who promises to keep the information confidential. However, the friend breaks his promise and proceeds to tell several people. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

A family member humiliates you in front of others by sharing a story about you that you did not want anyone to know. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the family member?

A stranger breaks into your house and steals a substantial sum of money from you. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the stranger?

How are we doing so far?

It seems as though Peter comes to Jesus with his own version of a Forgiveness Likelihood Scale. Peter's question, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" is like asking, "How many times, on a scale from 0-7, must I forgive someone?" Jesus' answer, as we have seen, is literally off the scale: "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

Now, I take it that Jesus is not saying that Peter needs to recalibrate his Forgiveness Likelihood Scale. I really don't think if Peter had asked, "How many times should I forgive, as many as 77 times?" that Jesus would have said, "Yes, 77, that seems about right." Rather, I think Jesus' response is a way of saying the question and what it is trying to measure is not quite right. The Psalmist says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us." It's hard to put a number on that type of forgiveness!

And, yet, many of us may still sympathize with Peter. It seems to us that following Jesus ought to make some difference in our lives. He tells us to forgive those who have sinned against us. He tells us to love our enemies. He says our righteousness ought to exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Okay. We want to follow and we are trying the best we can. But, perhaps like Peter, we would also like some benchmarks to know how we are doing. We may think Peter asking Jesus if he ought to forgive someone as many as seven times is a reasonable request for some practical guidelines. For most of us, sometime in our walk with the Lord, we have probably asked ourselves: Am I doing this right?

Unfortunately, that question may be part of the problem. The spiritual danger is that when we focus on our virtue and character strengths, we may become a bit too preoccupied with ourselves. And the real danger happens when we start thinking of our character strengths as accomplishments of our noble, virtuous, righteous selves. Here, we can too easily slide into self-righteousness, the smug attitude that knows what real forgiveness is, who is a truly forgiving person and who is not, who deserves forgiveness and who does not, and maybe even the extent and limits of forgiveness: "seven times seems about right."

Here we can easily forget that, while our character strengths and virtues may indeed glorify God, when it comes to the Gospel, our Lord doesn't just deal with parts of us, the noble bits that we would like to put on display, but rather God seeks a relationship with whole human beings, every thought, word, and deed, everything, absolutely everything, that we are and we do. And when we remember this, none of us, saints or sinners, people who are off the charts on the forgiveness scale and those of us who still struggle to forgive, have a leg to stand on. We are all utterly dependent on the unconditional, unmerited grace and mercy of Christ, who has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west.

Perhaps that's why Jesus tells Peter the story about the unforgiving servant, a story where the numbers don't add up, because the numbers can't be added up, when it comes to what Jesus has done for us. In the story, a servant owes the king ten thousand talents. Now, this is a crazy number. A single talent was more than 15 years' worth of daily wages. So, when Jesus says, this servant owed the king ten thousand talents, he's effectively saying he owed him a bazillion dollars.

The servant, no surprise, couldn't pay back the debt, so the king orders him and everything he has to be sold off. So, the servant falls on his knees and begs for an extension and promises that if he gets some extra time, he will pay everything back. And, we don't know if we are to laugh at him or to pity him, because there is no way the servant will ever be able to pay back the king. Maybe the king was amused,

because he responds to this ridiculous request with an amazing act: Since there is no way the slave will ever be able to pay back what he owes, the king just forgives the debt, every last cent, and sets the slave free.

Yet, when the servant, who has just been forgiven a debt of a bazillion dollars, runs into a guy who owes him a hundred denarii – which amounts to a few bucks in comparison to what he owed the king – what does he do? Well, he grabs the guy by the throat and demands that he pay up. And when the king finds out that the servant for whom he had just forgiven an unimaginable amount wouldn't forgive the pittance that was owed him by another, he had the servant thrown into prison.

Jesus reframes the whole question about forgiveness. When it comes to forgiveness, we are all like servants who owe our Lord and King more than we can imagine. Try as we may to repay our debt through our character strengths or our virtues or our willingness to forgive as many as seven times, we will never be able to pay back all that we owe to God. But the good news is that despite our inability to ever give back to God everything we ought, God forgives us anyway, completely. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has taken upon Godself all our burdens and sins and debts and has forgiven them.

Completely, irrevocably, utterly forgiven and healed by Jesus. God is the God who forgives.

We forgive, then, because God forgives. The forgiveness that we are to pass on to others is the forgiveness we have in union with Christ. Not because we are moral heroes or because we seek our own wellbeing, but because we are forgiven sinners.

Forgiveness may very well be a character strength and virtue. It probably does contribute to leading good and happy lives. Saints like Peter probably do score more highly on Forgiveness Likelihood Scales. But, Jesus reminds us, when it comes to our ability and need to forgive, we are, all of us, those of us who have great character strengths and those of us who do not, penitents, debtors kneeling at the foot of the cross.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Be careful what you pray for – you just might get it.

The Rev. Joseph S. Pagano, Ph.D. is an Episcopal priest who currently serves as a priest in the Parish of Pasadena and Cormack in the Anglican Diocese of Western Newfoundland, Canada. He and his wife, the Rev. Amy Richter have a new book, Common Prayer: Reflections on Episcopal Worship (Cascade Books, 2019), available. It is a collection of personal essays by Episcopal laypeople and clergy, fiction and non-fiction writers, poets, musicians, and theologians reflecting on experiences of worship.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He 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, and is seated at the

right hand of the Father. 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.

The Prayers

V: The Lord be with you.

R: *And also with you.*

Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Suffrages B

V. Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance;

R. Govern them and uphold them, now and always.

V. Day by day we bless you;

R. We praise your name for ever.

V. Lord, keep us from all sin today;

R. Have mercy upon us, Lord, have mercy.

V. Lord, show us your love and mercy;

R. For we put our trust in you.

V. In you, Lord, is our hope;

R. And we shall never hope in vain.

Collect of the Day

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A Collect for Sundays

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A Prayer for Mission

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our

hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.

Here may be sung a hymn.

Authorized intercessions and thanksgivings may follow.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. *Amen. 2 Corinthians 13:14*

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