

Being Forgiven & Forgiving

John 20:19-23

April 18, 2021

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Last three Sundays were special.

On Palm Sunday, March 28, we joined the Lord entering Jerusalem and then journeying with him to the cross during the Holy Week. On Easter Sunday, April 4, we celebrated His resurrection in our midst.

Last Sunday we continued to celebrate His resurrected presence and power, that our Christian ancestors considered God's awesome humor, by sharing some humorous jokes and stories.

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Today, we return to the Lord's Prayer. As you might recall, we have been meditating the Lord's Prayer one line by one line since the first Sunday in Lent, February 21.

"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..."

Today we turn our attention to "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

There are two teachings in this prayer.

The first one is: Jesus teaches that we ought to ask God's forgiveness. "Forgive us our trespasses."

A pastor was teaching a young group of children about sin and forgiveness. He asked the class, "Now class, what is the one thing we need to do before we can receive forgiveness?" A little girl named Mary raised her hand. "Yes, Mary," the pastor said as he called on her. She said, "Before we can receive forgiveness, we need to sin."

Thank you, Paul for sharing this humorous story last Sunday.

“What is the one thing we need to do before we can receive forgiveness?”

According to the Lord’s prayer he taught us, Jesus’ answer is “Ask”. He would say, “Ask God, saying, “Forgive us our trespasses”

The Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament alike, clearly shows us God is God of mercy who forgives.

For example, Isaiah 1:18 reads, “Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

David prayed to God after realizing his transgression against God, “1Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. 3For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.” (Psalm 51:1-3)

Jesus portrayed God as a loving and forgiving father who welcomes his prodigal son back home. (Luke 15:11-25) “Get the fatted calf and kill it. And let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” Can you see a big smile on his face and hear a joyful noise of celebration?

God is merciful and forgiving. Jesus reminds us of God who is merciful and forgiving and teaches us to ask God, saying, “forgive us our trespasses.”

You might ask this question: Have we not forgiven by God through the death of Jesus on the cross? Has Jesus not taken the cross for our sins? Why do we have to ask forgiveness over and over?

Yes, we are forgiven by Jesus’ atoning sacrifice on the cross. We are saved by Jesus’ redemptive death on the cross. It is God’s radical act of salvation out of His unconditional love.

Using the words of Paul the Apostle, through his redemptive work on the cross, we have been considered “righteous” before the eyes of God. Using the words of Paul

Tillich, a theologian, we have been accepted by God as we are. Faith is accepting that we are accepted by God unconditionally.

So we, people of faith sing with joy and thanksgiving, "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see."

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But the reality is that we, children of God, do things against God and disobey God's commandments. We want to glorify God the Parent in heaven but fail doing so consciously and unconsciously.

So we fully understand Paul the Apostle who cries out, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ... Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:19, 24)

Who are we? Martin Luther, one of the Protestant reformers, said, we are forgiven sinners. We are forgiven by God's grace but do commit sins against God and against God and against each other.

John the Apostle says, "8If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.... 10If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." (I John 1:8, 10)

We do commit sins and we do have sin.

Look at you and look at me.

How bad we are. How wicked we are. How dishonest we are. How unkind we are. How cunning we are. How greedy we are. How selfish we are. How unloving we are. How lazy we are. How indifferent we are. How judgmental we are. How hypocritical we are. We all need God's forgiveness every day.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses.."

Let me share with you what I have been doing these days.

I have been taking time to ask God's forgiveness every day right before going to bed. Closing eyes, I trace back what happened each hour from dawn to dusk, from sunrise to sunset.

While recalling each hour and each conversation and each meeting, I ask myself, "are there any words I spoke or any acts I did that might hurt anyone, including family members, friends, people I met today?" "Didn't I miss any opportunities to love and do good?" "Any thoughts or any intentions not Christians?"

As I realize those trespasses, I lay down them before God one by one and ask God to forgive me. "Sorry, God. Please forgive me my transgressions."

Then, I pray the "Jesus' prayer", also known as the Prayer among the Orthodox Christians. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Over and over as I fall to sleep.

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Back to the ranch...

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

Jesus taught us one more lesson by adding, "as we forgive those who trespass against us." Why?

Jesus put this additional phrase to teach us forgiving those who sins against us should go hand in hand with asking God to forgive our sins.

"How can you expect to receive God's forgiveness when you do not forgive those who sin against you?" We are reminded of his saying, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven (Luke 6:37)

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One day, Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. (Matthew 7:21-22)

Peter thought that he not only needs to forgive but needs to keep track of all that math, too. Thank you, Franklyn for this humor you shared last Sunday.

Jesus did not ask us to count each time we forgive up to 490 times and not to forgive at the 491st time. What he meant is forgiving is meant to be limitless and unconditional. Forgiving is what we Christians do all the time.

Paul the Apostle exhorts Christians in Ephesus, saying, “2and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

To Christians in Colossae, he writes, “12As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” (Col. 3:12-13)

And Jesus asks his disciples to move one more big step, saying, 27“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6:27) Wow. It is a radical command for us. In short, Jesus wants us to “Be merciful to everyone, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36)

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Why forgiving life? Why does the Lord want us to be forgiven and forgive?

It is because forgiveness brings peace we need in this life.

Each of us has been hurt at one time or another, and each of us has hurt others. And therefore, just as all of us must forgive, so all of us need to be forgiven. Without forgiveness, we will be filled with anger and resentment, which eventually leads us not to enjoy this life, God-given gift. Without forgiveness, we will not find peace. We all need forgiveness.

Ernest Hemingway wrote a book entitled *Capital of the World*. He told a story of a father and his son named Paco had been estranged for some reason.

As a result, Paco ran away from home. No one could really say why he ran away. Perhaps he didn't. Maybe he was kicked out of his home by his father for something foolish that he said or did.

Making the story short, Paco's father decided to find Paco and be reconciled with him. There was little to no chance that he would be able to find Paco by wandering the streets of Madrid, so instead he put an announcement in the local newspaper El Liberal. The advertisement read, "Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven! Love, Papa."

At the time of the meeting, when Paco's father got to the Hotel, he wasn't prepared for what he was about to see. Because Paco was such a common name in Spain (a nickname for Francisco), the next day at noon, there were 800 young men with the same name waiting for their fathers – waiting for the forgiveness they thought they would receive that day.

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Back to the Gospel lesson.

What is the first command the risen Christ gave to his disciples? "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In short, Jesus commands them to "forgive"

Look what he did right before this "Do forgive" commandment. He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Why?

Here is something we need to remember all the time. That is, in order to fulfill this "do forgive" commandment, we need the Holy Spirit, the spirit of the living God. So Jesus breathed on his disciples, first before giving the commandment. It is not we but God, the Holy Spirit who do forgiving through us and for us.

Do you hear Jesus saying to his disciples before breathing on them?

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit and forgive." What he really meant must be "Go and forgive by the power of the Holy Spirit as God the Father has sent me to do the ministry of forgiveness for you."

Who are we? We are the disciples of the risen Christ Jesus being called and sent to the world to do participate at God's forgiving and healing ministry.

Here I am, Lord. Send me. Here we are, Lord. Send us! Amen.