



July 12, 2020

Good Morning Bethany Worshippers,

Welcome to this “At Home Worship Service” ... I am glad that you have chosen to be here this morning. Though it has been some time since we have all been together in person for worship, we are still very much a united faith community. God’s Spirit knows no boundaries of space, time, or the constrictions of a pandemic. Through these “At Home” services we are all united in spirit as a community of faith bound together in the love of God.

Today we have a guest preacher. Pastor Kristin Engstrom is the Country Coordinator for the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program in Senegal. Each year, young adults from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America join her in Senegal, where they serve for one year with our partners in the Lutheran Church of Senegal and Senegalese Lutheran Development Services.

Pastor Engstrom is originally from the midwestern United States, she is a proud graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Pastor Kristin served two different parishes in northern New Jersey for six years, and then accepted the call to start and then coordinate the YAGM program in Senegal in 2016.

Senegal is the furthest western country on the continent of Africa. A country of great hospitality. A country where Christians and Muslims and Animists seek to live together in peace. A country where young adults from the ELCA spend a year accompanying our partners in Senegal, even as they themselves are transformed by the wonderful people of Senegal through the YAGM program. The Lutheran Church of Senegal is also one of the companion churches of the Grand Canyon Synod, ELCA. It is always good for us to know that not only does the church of which we are a part extend beyond the walls of our own congregation, but also beyond the boundaries of countries. You are part of a worldwide church. Our benevolence dollars help support ministries such as what you will learn about today in Pastor Engstrom’s message.

If you do not have computer online capability, the worship service is printed out and contains a written sermon that I gave back in 2014. May God bless our time of worship today.

Pastor Rick

WORSHIP July 12, 2020

(To watch the videotaped version of the worship service, click the link below)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAQVwzBA9nM>

(To read the service with a written sermon from Pastor Rick, continue on from here)

GREETING AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, let us gather in the one unifying Spirit, the Spirit of God in the church throughout the world.

Let us worship God as children ... With wonder and awe.

Let us worship God as youth... With questions and eager hearts.

Let us worship God as adults ... With gratitude and praise.

Let us worship God as elders ... With wisdom and hope.

Come, let us gather in the one unifying Spirit. Let us gather in unity with our sisters and brothers throughout the world.

A BRIEF CONFESSION

Lord have mercy.

We have missed the mark of your desire for our lives.

Christ have mercy.

We have not turned ourselves around from patterns of living contrary to your will.

Lord have mercy.

Forgive, renew, and guide us into a newness of life in Christ Jesus.

God forgives, Christ renews, and the Holy Spirit guides us to life anew.

Live now, as the redeemed People of God.

GREETING

The Lord be with you

May we worship in a unity of spirit as Jesus calls us all to be one.

We worship as sisters and brothers of Christ called to the common mission of being the love of God in the world!

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1st Reading – Isaiah 55:10-12

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

2nd Reading – Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

*Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.*

Know that the Lord is God.

*It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.*

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;

*his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

Gospel reading – John 17:15-23

I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

SERMON

Matthew 18:21-22

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?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

Pentecost 14

SEVEN TIMES 70
Matthew 18:21-22

September 14, 2014

INTRODUCTION

- In the PBS film *Forgiveness: A Time to Love and a Time to Hate*, writer, producer and director Helen Whitney explores a compelling range of stories, from personal betrayal to global reconciliation after genocide.

And in those real-life stories she seeks to delve into the complexities of forgiveness ... forgiveness is not a simple act of the will where one says, "I forgive you" and then all is well.

Forgiveness is tough to do, agonizing to accomplish, a hard journey of soul searching often times. Indeed, one may go on for years partially accomplishing the act of forgiveness, struggling mightily to release cords of anger, resentment, even revenge for an infraction or a wrong done to them.

- In Christian communities, forgiveness is a major and basic tenant of our faith ... we say, in the prayer

Jesus taught us, *"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"* ... we say that

every week. And we hear Jesus words from the cross, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing"* as nails are being driven through his flesh. And we hear today Jesus words when Peter asks if there are limitations to forgiveness, Jesus says, *"Not seven times, but I tell you seventy times seven"* which is to say there are no limits.

- I think we have, in our Christian communities, communicated very well the importance of forgiveness

to living out our faith, But we've been very poor at helping people understand the agonizing process (necessary often times) that needs to take place in order for forgiveness to be real.

We tell people that they are to be forgiving because Jesus tells us to be so and has forgiven us. Then,

when they struggle to forgive and find themselves caught-up in the thick of the messiness that real forgiveness requires (often times) they feel something is wrong with them, that they are not faithful, that they are not good Christians.

I want to accomplish three things today: 1) To underscore that forgiveness is a process ... often times an agonizing one.

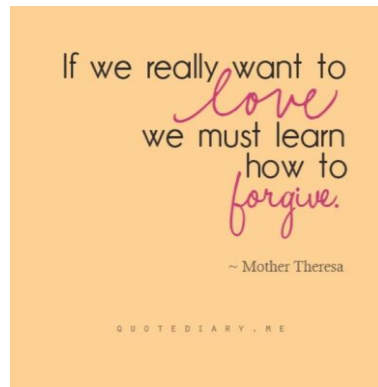
2) To help you visualize that though forgiveness is a process requiring a lot of hard work on our part, ultimately it is a gift that God gives us; and

3) To help you meditate upon the gift of forgiveness, praying that it comes to us through God's love,

God's power,
God's grace.

We will use this song to guide our thinking and meditation

**Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying.
Send us love, send us pow'r, send us grace.**

FORGIVENESS AND GOD'S LOVE

Mother Teresa said:

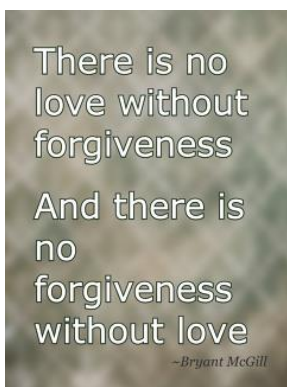
“If we really want to love we must learn how to forgive”

We can reverse that and say: “If we really want to forgive we must learn how to love”

Forgiveness is very much tied up with love ... I'm not talking about love like parents for children and visa-versa, or between siblings, or the love that good friends have for one another. It is not possible to have that kind of love for everyone, much less for those who harm you in some way. I'm talking about love for any human being because we all are created in God's image. Love that extends the dignity and courtesies we all would want extended to ourselves whether from a stranger or a loved-one.

FORGIVENESS IS ROOTED IN THAT BASIC LOVE IN WHICH GOD CREATED US.

To that end, I share this story. It's titled: An Open Letter from the widow of Ronnie Smith to the Libyan People.



My husband and best friend Ronnie Smith loved the Libyan people. For more than a year, Ronnie served as a chemistry teacher in a school in Benghazi, and he would gladly have given more years to Libya if unknown gunmen had not cut his life short on December 5, 2013. Ronnie and I came to Libya because we saw the suffering of the Libyan people, but we also saw your hope, and we wanted to partner with you to build a better future Ronnie grew to love you and your way of life, as did I. Ronnie loved you all so much, especially his students. He loved to joke with you, tell stories about you, help you with your lives and challenge you to be all that you could be. He did his best to live out his faith humbly and respectfully within a community of people with a different faith.

I always expected that God would give us a heart to love you, but I never expected you to love us so much. Since Ronnie's death my love for you has increased in ways that I never imagined. I feel closer to you now than ever before.

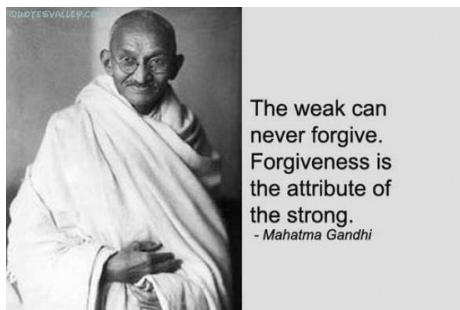
I hear people speaking with hate, anger and blame over Ronnie's death, but that's not what Ronnie would want. Ronnie would want his death to be an opportunity for us to show one another love and forgiveness, because that's what God has shown us.

**Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying.
Send us love, send us pow'r, send us grace**

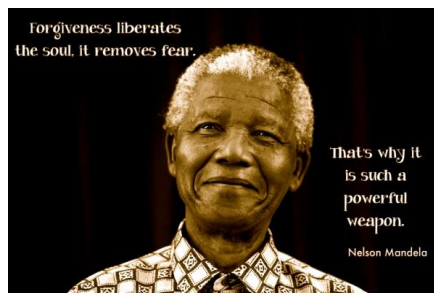
FORGIVENESS AND GOD'S POWER



Forgiveness is powerful ... perhaps the most powerful idea, action, and healing there is.



Gandhi said: *"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong"*



And Nelson Mandela said: Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon.

The power of forgiveness is the power of God. And as is the case with God (almost always) it is so opposite our understanding of power.

We measure power with wealth, armies, and weapons ... the power of forgiveness

defies human logic. It's not a, "If he hits you, hit him back" ... it's a, "To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer also the other" kind of idea. Don't take that as Jesus suggesting you be a "doormat", but as a teaching not to be consumed with getting even and seeking revenge ... there's no power in that, only the maddening cycle of retributive violence.

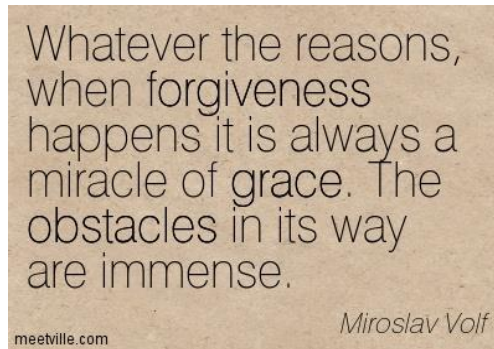
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FORGIVENESS AND GOD'S GRACE

- Forgiveness is *puzzling* ... and because it is so it fits well into God's grace, because
 - God's grace,
 - God's blessing to us
 - God's abundant generosity ... is a *puzzle*. Why is God always so good to us? It's GRACE
- In Philip Yancey's book *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, he describes forgiveness as an unnatural act. He writes, "I never find forgiveness easy, and rarely do I find it completely satisfying. Nagging injustices remain, and the wounds still cause pain. I have to approach God again and again, yielding to him the residue of what I thought I had committed to him long ago. [Because of that ... it's only God's GRACE that can make forgiveness complete and whole ... and in the process I become more complete and more whole myself]"
- For thought as we conclude today:

**FORGIVE IN ORDER TO BE
FORGIVEN = LAW.
OR
FORGIVE BECAUSE YOU HAVE
BEEN FORGIVEN = GRACE.**



**Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying.
Send us love, send us pow'r, send us grace**

AMEN

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe in God who loves us and wants us to love each other, This is our God.

We believe in Jesus who cared about children and held them in his arms; who welcomed the outcaste and showed them God's love; who spoke of our unity as people of God's creating. Jesus wanted a world where everyone could live together in peace. This is Jesus Christ.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who keeps working with us until everything is good and true. This is the Holy Spirit. We can be the Church reminding people of God because we love one another ... both friend and stranger, both ally and enemy.

This we believe by the power of God the Creator, Jesus our earthly companion, and the Holy Spirit our comforter and guide. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of unity and wholeness ... with wonderful diversity of languages and cultures you created all people in your image. Free us from prejudice and fear, that we may see your face in the faces of people around the world. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of unity and wholeness ... you sent your Son Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to yourself. We praise and bless you for those whom you have sent in the power of the Spirit to preach the gospel to all nations. We thank you that in all parts of the earth a community of love has been gathered together by their prayers and labors, and that in every place your servants call upon your name. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of unity and wholeness ... Cleanse from our own hearts the seeds of strife: greed and envy, harsh misunderstandings and ill will, fear and desire for revenge. Make us quick to welcome ventures in cooperation among the peoples of the world, so that there may be woven the fabric of a common good too strong to be torn by the evil hands of war. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of unity and wholeness ... We pray for Bethany members on our prayer list. Give them the blessing of your presence amid their times of trial. We pray for our congregation in this time of suspended worship that we will still continue to be a committed community of faith seeking to be the light of Jesus in our community and world. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of unity and wholeness ... We pray for our world in a time of pandemic and societal distress and change. Give our leaders wisdom, compassion, insight, and courage to lead in ways that serve all the people under their charge. We pray for doctors and nurses, EMT's, and all those on the frontline of healthcare amid this COVID-19 pandemic. Give them health, energy, compassion, and the strength to care for those struggling with illness and hospitalization. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Listen to each of us, Lord, as we come to you in a moment of silent prayer

Into your hands, great and compassionate God, we commend all for whom and about which we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING *(Please mail your weekly offering to the church - 4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)*

PRAYER OF BLESSING

Let us pray:

In the wonder of your abundance, O Lord, we are blessed with the gifts of life. Teach us generosity to give where there is need. Teach us compassion to give where there is hurt. Teach us love to give where there is emptiness. You are a God of abundance; teach us to live abundantly in service to you.

AMEN

THE LORD'S PRAYER

You may say traditional Lord's Prayer or use the Aramaic translation printed below or you may say both in succession

*O Creator, the one who gave birth to the universe,
You are the sacred source of our being.*

*Focus Your ways, Your light, within us.
Make us useful for Your purposes here on earth so that
Your desire and our lives become one.*

Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.

*Loosen the cords of mistakes binding us,
as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt.*

*Do not let surface things delude us, snare us, and lead us away
from You and Your purpose.*

*But free us from what holds us back, give us power to
live as you intended and created us to live.*

*From You comes the all-working will, the lively strength to act,
the song that beautifies all and renews itself from age to age. AMEN*

BENEDICTION

*Go into your week
with your ears pitched
to the sound of God's voice calling your name.*

*Go into your week
with your eyes peeled
for the face of Jesus in unexpected places.*

*Go into your week
with your soul poised
to receive the Spirit of God,
the Spirit of Peace.*

DISMISSAL

*May you go to be a force of unity for the world.
We go in the oneness of Christ to love and serve God by serving others.*