

WORSHIP September 13, 2020

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

<https://youtu.be/2Gr1YSyVdl0>

(To read the service, continue on from here)

GREETING AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP

Worship is a time to learn the ways of God.

As God's love is genuine, may our love toward one another be authentic.

Worship is a time to be caught up in the Spirit of God.

We call upon God to instill within us a spirit of generosity, hospitality, and hope.

Worship is a time to nurture peacefulness within and among ourselves.

We pray for a humbleness of heart and a willingness to forgive and receive forgiveness.

May this time of worship nurture us in the ways of God.

A BRIEF CONFESSION

If we say we have no sin, if we believe we are not broken; we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

God of forgiveness, God of healing ... fill us with your truth, your grace.

We trust that your mercy is our forgiveness, your compassion our healing.

God of forgiveness, God of healing ... fill us with your truth, your grace.

We live in the power of a forgiving God.

We live in the presence of Jesus the Christ ... we are forgiven, thanks be to God. Amen.

GREETING

The Lord be with you

Be filled with the spirit of God today.

We worship to open our hearts for God's blessing.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1st Reading – Romans 14:1-12

1. Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. 2. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak only vegetables. 3. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat, for God has welcomed them. 4. Who are you to pass judgment 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 honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God, while those who abstain, abstain in honor 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 judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment 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.

2nd Reading – Psalm 103:1-13

1. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. 2. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits, 3. who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4. who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 5. who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. 6. The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. 7. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

8. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. 10. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. 11. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him. 12. As far as the east is from the west, so far, he removes our transgressions from us. 13. As father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

Gospel reading – 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 times 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 (1 gold talent=100 lbs., at current exchange rate \$19,200,000,000) 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. 28. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii (about \$30), and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." 29. Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, "have patience with me, and I will pay you." 30. But he refused, then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their Lord all that had taken place. 32. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?" 34. And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

SERMON – Pastor Joseph Dillion

15th Sunday After Pentecost, Sept. 13, 2020 "The Power of Forgiveness."

We could focus on the text and talk about the great forgiveness of the king and the meanness of spirit and the lack of compassion of the servant who was forgiven so and then refused to forgive the one who owed him so little. But then it might be easy to keep our forgiving of others—the forgiving of ourselves—in another bucket that we could close our eyes too, because we really aren't like that unforgiving slave—aren't we.

Indeed, the reality of life is that forgiveness is hard, hard business. It is hard to forgive those who have hurt us in any way. It is hard for us to accept forgiveness when it is offered to us from those we may have hurt. It is hard to offer forgiveness to those who have hurt us. But at the core of this gospel lesson this morning is the forgiveness of those who are in need of being forgiven. It is not easy; it is sometimes painful; it is sometimes rejected; at times we wonder how we can forgive someone who has wronged us so deeply, or how someone can forgive us when we have wronged another.

As a pastor I have heard the anger, the frustration, the disappointment, seen and felt the tears of hurt, pain, sorrow that comes with being hurt by those we know and by those we don't. Seeing the damage that happens when that moment occurs when by another's unthinking or deliberate action, wrong occurs. In that moment and in the moments that follow, forgiveness as an action, as a thought is far from us: yet I know that in time forgiveness must come, or we shall forever be condemned to a life of bitterness and anger toward God and toward all of humanity, and life will become unbearable. That is the torture that occurs in the parable that Jesus tells today. And when we see amazing acts of forgiveness, we wonder do we not, if we could forgive as we are called to do as Christ people. Have we forgotten the Amish who forgave the man who shot five of their children and aided his family in the aftermath of such a horror. Or how quickly do we pass by the wives, the brothers, sisters, husbands, parents of those who die at the hands of others, be it be murder or accident, and they offer those who brought death to their door, forgiveness. I don't know that I could, and I hope I never have to. But let us be clear, forgiveness doesn't happen at once; forgiveness often times takes time; takes an inner struggle that can never be put into words. Forgiveness is a gift given to us by the grace of God; modeled for us by Christ, who calls us to model forgiveness to the world as we have been forgiven by God. Forgiveness is necessary for healing of our spirit, and without it, there is no healing. In this time when compassion and caring and forgiveness are scorned, we are called to rise above the anger and the hatred of our time and extend forgiveness: no matter how long it takes

The following is a true story of two men who have had to answer that question for themselves and how it changed their lives. I saw this on one of the sites that I use in my sermon research.

When Eric Lomax was posted in Singapore in the summer of 1941, he knew nothing of the horror that would come upon them in the spring of 1942. That spring the whole of Southeast Asia was conquered by the Japanese. Singapore fell and Lomax was taken prisoner along with thousands of other British soldiers. He was declared a spy by his Japanese captors. In their interrogations, they broke both his arms, smashed several ribs, and left him barely alive. Yet somehow, he survived the death camps and returned to England at the end of the war. For fifty years, the damage he endured left him full of bitterness and anger and what we would call PTSD today, poisoned his relationship with all he loved: first with his father; then his wife who would divorce him because of his anger and bitterness.

In 1985, Lomax received a letter from a former Army chaplain who had survived the camps also. He had made contact with Nagase Takashi, the man who was the interpreter during Lomax's interrogations. Nagase had come to realize the suffering that he had caused during the war and had devoted the rest of his life to whatever restitution he could make to the prisoners of war he had harmed during the war. He had built a Buddhist temple near the place where Lomax and others had been held and beaten and starved and killed.

Lomax after all the years of bitterness and pain was filled with anger and the desire for vengeance as many of us would be in truth. He shared his frustrations and anger with his second wife, Patti. She too was indignant that Nagase could write about coming to a sense of peace with the war when she knew about the pain and the troubles that had dogged her husband for decades. In her anger, she wrote to Nagase about Lomax's ongoing emotional pain.

To her surprise, she received a letter back from Nagase. At first, she was almost afraid to open it, but she finally did. What spilled out was 'an extraordinarily beautiful letter,' as she put it. Even Lomax found himself moved deeply by its compassion and desire for reconciliation.

A year later the Lomax's met Nagase at the location of the infamous The River Kwai Bridge. In halting English, Nagase repeated over and over, 'I am very, very sorry.'

Lomax in tears, took him by the arm and said, "That's very kind of you to say so." They met for hours and Lomax gave Nagase a short letter. In it he said that he could not forget what happened there in the camp, but that he had chosen to offer Nagase 'total forgiveness from his heart.' Nagase wept with emotion.

When interviewed later, Lomax said simply: 'Sometime the hating has to stop.'

And perhaps for our time with all of the divisions; the anger; the hatred; the frustration those words of forgiveness between old enemies are words that our time needs to hear. Words that we need to choose to say to one another. Words that God has already said to us—You are forgiven. Indeed, Lomax was and is right: Sometime the hating has to stop. It will stop if we are willing to live the forgiven life that Christ calls us too. The hating; the anger; will stop. Finally. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

*We believe in God,
Creator of the universe,
Giver of every good gift,
Author of life itself.*

*We believe in Jesus Christ,
who reminded us of the coming of God's kingdom,
who commanded us to care for those in need,
who taught us to store up treasures in heaven, not on earth,
and who gave us the example of self-giving love.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who inspires us to faithful stewardship of God's gifts and
that God has given us gifts to be shared freely and generously, in a spirit of love and joy.
We believe that faithful stewardship is an act of worship,
a means of praising God who has blessed us abundantly.
We believe that God has great things in store for us,
for it is in giving that we receive. AMEN*

(Allen & Sara Ewing-Merrill, 2004)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... bless our lives, lead us in your ways, gives us hearts for gratitude and service. Fill us with your grace, that what we desire is also what you desire. Grant us the understanding that our hearts' true desire is the love of you. May the love of Christ urge us on, may we walk by faith. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... bless those who govern. Bless the leaders of nations, countries, towns, and cities. Bless all those who lead in all manner of ways – social, political, and religious. Fill the hearts of all with your wisdom. Guide us in the way of justice and integrity for all. Guide us to walk by faith. Holy God, tend to those who suffer in mind, body, and spirit. Tend to the tired, the dying, the poor and the hungry. Help us to follow the love of Christ, a love which urges us on to seek and serve Christ in others. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... 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.

Holy God, giver love and blessing ... 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

God of all blessing, giver of all good gifts; day by day you shower us with what we need to live and prosper. With glad and generous hearts and in a response of thanksgiving, we return a portion of our wealth. May what we give be a symbol of our gratitude and a blessing of your love for those who may be helped through our offering. AMEN

THE LORD'S PRAYER

You may say traditional Lord's Prayer or use the Aramaic translation printed below

*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

*People of God, look for Jesus!
Seek him as a treasure in this great wide world.
Seek him in the eyes of your loved ones and in the eyes of strangers.
May your heart burn within you as the Lord draws close to you this week.*

DISMISSAL

*Go in Peace ... to live and serve in the way of the cross
Thanks be to God.*