

Straight from the "Hart"

September 10, 2023

Prepare – for Forgiveness



Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are really glad you are here and participating in today's time of worship.

Affirmation of Forgiveness (P – Pastor, C – Reader with Congregation)

P: What if God paid us back in full for all the wrong we have done?

C: We seek God's mercy...

P: yet we ourselves look for payback when we are wronged.

C: We think it "fair" and "right" when we retaliate with harsh words and withdraw from relationships.

P: The forgiveness God offers on our account is larger than we can comprehend, yet we still withhold forgiveness and carry grudges.

C: We are eager to do God's judging.

P: We (sometimes subconsciously) conspire in our inner thoughts to secure God's forgiveness while avoiding honest repentance.

C: We will seek forgiveness for the sins we know in our hearts, and from the sins we hide, even from ourselves.

P: The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and has not dealt with us according to our sins. Instead, God has chosen to sacrifice of his own Son to pay the debt of our sin.

C: It is because Jesus Christ pays the last full measure that our sins are forgiven.

P: This gift of forgiveness makes us able, with the power of Holy Spirit, to choose to forgive, renew and restore.

C: We can live in right relationship with each other and with our God.

ad from "Prayer of Confession: based on Matthew 18:21-25, written by Bill Wessner and posted on Confession RCL blog.

Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, you open our eyes to see the truth about you. Continue to give us hope in your power to heal and renew us, individually and as an international church. By your Spirit, help us to trust you with our whole heart. We respond to your great love

with generosity. Receive these gifts and offerings for the renewal of our congregation and wider community in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Call to Worship

We have come to once again be awestruck by the unequalled, incomparable Holy One whose great power and mighty strength created and calls out each one of the starry host by name. He sent Jesus, who promised that he would always be present with us, loving, protecting, challenging, nurturing, strengthening, and transforming us -- that we may love and serve him in all that we are and do.

ad. from Isaiah 40:25-30, Matthew 28:20b,
and Jane V Doull ©1993 United Church Publishing House

There is Power

Words and Music: Lincoln Brewster and Mia Fieldes
© 2014 Integrity's Praise! Music (BMI) Worldwide Echoes (BMI)
adm at CapitolCMGPublishing

Where two or more are gathered in his name, he is there,
oh; For all who come, who run to him in faith, he is there.

Chorus

There is power in the name of Jesus. There is power, power in his name.
There is power in the name of Jesus. There is power, power in his name.

No fear, no lie can stand against us now; He is here,
whoa, the Word has come to silence ev'ry doubt; He is here.

Chorus

One name, one name can save. One name breaks ev'ry chain.
One name, always. One name, Jesus. One name, one name remains.
One name we will proclaim. One name, always, one name.

Chorus (2x)

Whoa, there's power in his name. Whoa there's power in his name.

Indescribable

Words: Laura Story and Jesse Reeves
Music: Laura Story arr. by Jeff Anderson
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Adm by EMI CMG Publishing.

From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea
Creations' revealing your majesty;
From the colors of fall to the fragrance of spring,
Ev'ry creature unique in the song that it sings.
All exclaiming,

Chorus

“Indescribable, uncontainable,
 you place the stars in the sky and you know them by name;
 You are amazing, God.”
 All powerful, untamable;
 awestruck, we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim,
 “you are amazing, God.”

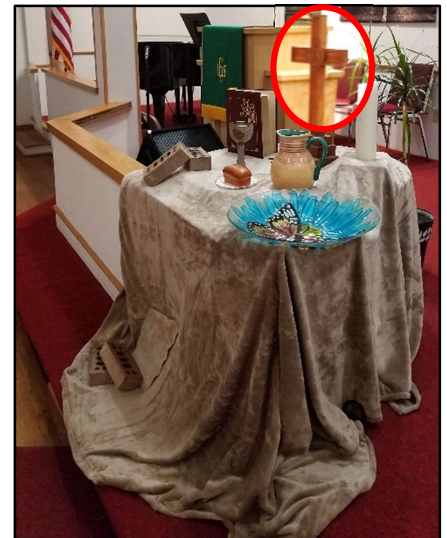
Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go,
 or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow?
 Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light
 yet conceals it to bring us the coolness of night?
 None can fathom:

Chorus

You are amazing, God.
 Chorus (2x)
 You are amazing God.

Theme

Our visual today is the large cross... Jesus has already told us earlier in the series that if we are going to find ourselves and truly live to the full, we have to be willing to pick up our “small cross”. You may not be able to see them, but they are there in front of the big cross. Those who were here that day received a small pocket cross to take with home with them. Another way of putting that is – we must have the discipline to give it our all and leave it all out there on the playing field of life... but we will lose ourselves if we try to save ourselves. (Luke 9:23-24) A simplistic example – generally speaking, why does a child bear false witness? Most often, their lie is an attempt at self-preservation from another failure that they have done. One of the first things Adam and Eve did after an act of disobedience was to lie – to proclaim innocence by blaming someone else – (Genesis 3:12ff) thus further damaging their relationship with God and with each other. And when that happens we become less than what we are meant to be and live less than we can become, for as I have heard often in younger years – when it comes to the law of living fully, the law of the 10 (of Moses) and the 2 (of Jesus) which we talked about last week, Jesus said the 2 summed up and fulfilled not only the 10 but all of the prophets as well, (Matthew 22:35-37)



and what I heard as a young person is that we never break the law, we break ourselves against the law. What can we do about our brokenness?

A brief version of a story by Tolstoy.

Martin was a shoe cobbler who worked hard and fair at reasonable prices in a basement shop, which was also his home. Through his street window high on the wall he saw most of his work walking by, (he could see from about the knee down, though if he leaned close he could also look up and see up to their faces as well. He went to bed one night after reading Scripture about turning the other cheek, and if someone asks for a coat, give them a cloak as well (about being generous with those who ask), and then how a sinful woman anointed Jesus feet while being hosted by a rich person who was judging Jesus for allowing this and Jesus replied that she was grateful and expressing that gratitude the whole time she was there; and he has done nothing to show any gratitude or even proper hospitality that they were supposed to do. And this cobbler worried that if the Lord came to him, he would be more like the Pharisee than the woman, only taking care of himself instead of others...

He fell asleep at his table with this on his mind and then woke with a start as he heard his name being called as real as if someone was standing over him. But no one was. "Who's there?" he asked twice as he looked around. The voice came again, "Martin, Look out in the street tomorrow, for I shall come." [Much like Dicken's Scrooge], he didn't know if the voice was real, or he had dreamed it as he left his desk and laid down for the night.

The next day he started his normal routine, but with that voice's words on his mind. As he worked, he was drawn to look out the window. At one point he saw an old soldier – he recognized him by his boots. Out of charity, this soldier had been given a nearby place to stay in exchange for doing some chores. Martin saw him leaning on his shovel, either too cold or too weak to move the snow. Martin went out and invited him in for tea and the soldier didn't ask for it, but Martin refilled his cup 3 times as he told him about his experience the night before. The man thanked him for the comfort given of both body and soul.

Martin went back to his work. Later, he noticed a stranger, poorly dressed against the cold, her back to the wind trying to shield a baby she held in her arms. He ran to the street and brought her inside and had them sit on the bed by the stove. She nursed the baby while he prepared soup and bread and porridge. Then he held the baby by the stove while she went to the table and ate what she had prepared. He

found out that she had pawned her shawl the day before in desperation. The woman came back to the bed then and held her child. He went foraging – he found a cloak. He confessed to her that it was old and worn, but should do good to wrap up the baby nice and warm... Then he got out another box from which gave her enough money to get the shawl back out of the pawn shop.

The day went on. And now the event most relevant for us today – Martin noticed an apple woman (a woman who sells apples out of a basket) who had stopped just outside the window. She had a bag of wood chips that she had collected from a construction site which she would use to help heat her home. The bag was heavy and hurting her, so she set her basket of apples on a post while she shook the bag of wood chips trying to compact them down before she shifted the weight to her other shoulder. While she was doing this a boy in a tattered cap ran up snatched an apple and tried to slip away, but the woman saw it and was quick and grabbed him by the arm, and then by the hair, and gave him a tongue lashing as he screamed.

Martin rushed up his steps and into the street. The woman was threatening to take him to the police, [now remember this is Tolstoy – Russia – not our friendly American policemen] and the boy (remember natural self-preservation? From before?) lied, saying, “I did not take it, why are you beating me? Let me go!” Martin tried to separate them, he held the boy’s hand to keep him from running while saying to the woman, “Let him go, Granny. Forgive him for Christ’s sake.”

The woman persisted with threats of police, but Martin also persisted, “Let him go, Granny. He won’t do it again.” She finally let go, and the boy was going to run off, but Martin didn’t let go of him and turned to the boy. “Ask Granny’s forgiveness, and don’t do it again – I saw you take the apple.” Then the boy, knowing he was caught red-handed, cried and begged for pardon.

“That’s right”, said Martin as he gave the boy an apple and said he’d pay Granny for it. The woman said, “You’ll spoil him that way – he should be whipped so he’ll remember it for a week.” Martin replied, “That’s our way, but that is not God’s way. If a poor boy should be whipped for stealing an apple, what should be done to us for our sins?” Silence.

Martin then told her Jesus’ parable about servant who was forgiven a large debt, (which we will hear this later, so won’t tell now) Martin concluded, “God bids us to forgive, or we will not be forgiven. Forgive everyone, and a thoughtless youngster most of all.”

The woman shook her head and sighed. "It's true enough, but they are getting spoiled." she said. Martin replied, "Then we must show them a better way." And then the woman began to talk about her 7 children, only one left, and how she worked and sacrificed for them and as she talked, her heart softened some as she thought of her children, and then said about the boy, "It was only his childishness."

As she was about to hoist the bag of wood chips on her back, the boy said, "Let me carry them for you, Granny. I'm going that way." So, the old woman put the sack on his back, and they walked off down the street together talking, the woman had forgotten all about getting paid for the apple. As Martin went back down into his home and store, it was now dusk. He trimmed the lamp, cleaned up his work and sat down to his Bible – he meant to pick up where he left off, but it opened to another place. He thought of last night's dreamed voice when he heard rustling behind him, and then a whisper in his ear. "It is I", said the voice, and he turned to see the old soldier who smiled and then vanished like a cloud,

"It is I" said the voice again, and out of the dark stepped the woman with the baby in her arms – both smiled, and then they too vanished.

"It is I" said the voice once more, and the old woman and boy with the apple stepped out, smiled, and then vanished. Martin turned to his Bible where it had opened and read, "When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me. Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me." (See Matthew 25:35,40 (CEV)) And Martin understood his dreams had come true, and that the Savior had come to him that day, and he had welcomed him.

ad. and abr. from "Where Love Is, God Is" by Leo Tolstoy in "The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories" ed with commentary by William J Bennett.

Martin found an answer to the problem we started with -- that we have broken ourselves and killed our spirits against the law of full living, and we needed to meet and continue meeting the Savior and his standard of forgiveness – We need Someone who can intercede for us, Someone who has lived the life and exudes power and actions that get beneath our external actions and will work on the nature and attitude of our hearts -- Someone that will give us an opportunity to get back on the right path - by wiping out the record of our bad choices, and our natural inclination to do them -- by paying the price for our failures for us. This is what Christ came to do with his forgiveness, and he does this for us when we continue come to him...

Bible Reading 1 with Interlude

You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. When you came to Christ, Christ performed a spiritual circumcision — the cutting away of your sinful nature. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities by his victory over them on the cross. You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world... These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.

Colossians 2:13a,11a,c,13b,14,15a,c,20,23 (NLT)

The rules that seem so helpful don't work because they remain external – they can't dig deep enough into the heart of our lives and spirits to remove the underlying problem. Even in the Old Testament they instinctively knew this – that it required the best life to pay for our failed lives, our broken lives. They believed the life of a body was in its blood, and so avoiding blood in drink or food was important, and blood, with water, sprinkled on the altar, on the Law, on the people, and everything used in worship -- became the medium through which we became purified. They used the blood of animals. Whether or not they understood it at the time, it became clear that this was only an earthly shadow of a heavenly reality yet to come. Things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than with the blood of animals. Christ himself is that reality who entered heaven to accomplish this forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. The author of Hebrews writes that



See Leviticus 17:11-12, Hebrews 9:19-20,23-24, and Colossians 2:17

...even the first covenant was put into effect with the blood of an animal. [Moses] said, "This blood confirms the covenant God has made with you." In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. But now, once for all time, [Christ] has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice... to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly

waiting for him. So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

Hebrews 9:18,20,22,26b,28b, 11-12 (NLT)

Nothing But the Blood of Jesus

Words and Music: Robert Lowry

arr by Paul Mills © 2008 Van Ness Press, Inc adm. by Lifeway Worship.

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Chorus

Oh! precious is the flow that makes me white as snow;
no other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

For my pardon this I see, nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my cleansing this my plea, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Chorus

Nothing can for sin atone, nothing but the blood of Jesus;
Naught of good that I have done, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Chorus

This is all my hope and peace, nothing but the blood of Jesus;
This is all my righteousness, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Chorus

Prayers

Lord, if we all tried to live by the 10 and the 2, society would be a different place, but we don't, and so that makes it complicated in how we navigate living kingdom values in a world that doesn't follow them, it is difficult to discern how to balance your forgiving grace with a holy justice. Today we are broaching one of the hardest tenets of our faith – to not only receive grace, but to give it. Matthew West once wrote -- It is the hardest thing to give away, the last thing on our mind today, it always goes to those who don't deserve. It is the opposite of how we feel and takes everything we have just to say the word... for it flies in the face of all our pride, moves away the mad inside, it is anger's own worst enemy. Even when the jury and the judge say we've got a right to hold a grudge, it is the whisper in our ear saying "set it free". Because it will clear the bitterness away, it can set a prisoner free, there is no end to what its power can do. So, Lord, show us how to see what

your mercy sees. Help us to give what You gave to us and realize that the prisoner that it really frees --- is us. So, show me how to love the unlovable, to reach the unreachable, to do the impossible – to offer forgiveness, **Petitions** And Lord we also have request we want to share and lift up into your powerful healing hands. We continue to pray for * the situation that Reese and Calvin are facing and enduring, * we also pray for Jan’s good friend Darlene Tidmore, who has been hospitalized for about a week and a half with serious symptoms of something that has not yet be diagnosed, tests are being done. * Mary Jo Malott asks for continued prayers for Jim, * Jeff and Linda ask that we continue to pray for their friend Al who is still hospitalized with complications from an auto accident several weeks ago, * and we continue to pray for those unnamed except in our hearts and minds, we lift them up to you knowing that you are a good God who is watching over every situation – give us assurance of your care, your love, your power. And again teach us how to live the prayer that you taught us to pray ... **Lord’s Prayer**

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

The disciples still thinking in worldly values, asked Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus grabbed a nearby child and told them if they couldn’t turn from their sin and become as humble as this little child, the will not even enter heaven. He warns about leading children into sin, about how the world tempts people to sin, and that there will be great sorrow for those doing the tempting. That we should deal drastically and definitively with sin in our life. And to search for and welcome those who have lost their way, and to use care when needing to correct those who sin against you.

This causes Peter to ask how many times we are expected to forgive the person who sins against us – and he suggests a number that is more than twice the Jewish standard. Jesus replies either 77 or 70x7, and either way, he is not expecting us to keep a tally. Then he explains by telling a parable. Bracketed, bluish phrases are comments inserted into the text.

See Matthew 18:1-22

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like [this, and he should know since he came from there – it is like] a king who decided to collect the money his servants owed him. So the king began to collect his money. One servant owed him several million dollars. [The number given equaled the wages of 10,000 manual laborers working for 15 years. It is an understatement to say that this man is in way over his head.] “the servant did not have enough money to pay his master, the king. So the master ordered that everything the servant owned

should be sold, even the servant's wife and children. The money would be used to pay the king what the servant owed. "But the servant fell on his knees and begged, 'Be patient with me. I will pay you everything I owe.' The master felt sorry for his servant. [The master – *felt sorry* -- for his servant] So the master told the servant he did not have to pay. He let the servant go free.

Matthew 18:23-27 (ICB)

Music And because of his life given for ours, we are free to live fully again.

I Am Free

Words and Music: Jon Egan arr. by David Shipps
© 2004 Vertical Worship Songs c/o Integrity Media, Inc

Through you the blind will see, through you the mute will sing;
Through you the dead will rise, through you all hearts will praise.
Through you the darkness flees, through you my heart screams I am free.

Chorus (* echo)

I am free to run *, I am free to dance *, I am free to live for you *, I am free *.

Through you the kingdom comes, through you the battle's won;
Through you I'm not afraid, through you the price is paid.
Through you there's victory, because of you my heart sings I am free.

Chorus (2x)

I am free.

Music: That freedom is won by the grace Jesus offers us, let's stand if comfortable before the next reading and sermon and sing

Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)

Words (verses) John Newton Additional Lyrics: Chris Tomlin & Louie Giglio
Music: Trad. American Melody arr. and chorus by Chris Tomlin & Louie Giglio
arr. by Jeff Anderson © 2002 worshiptogether.com

Amazing grace how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now I'm found; Was blind, but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear; And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed.

Refrain

My chains are gone, I've been set free. My God, my Savior has ransomed me.
And like a flood His mercy reigns, unending love, amazing grace.
The Lord has promised good to me; His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be As long as life endures.

Refrain (2x)

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, The sun forbear to shine.

But God, who called me here below, will be forever mine, will be forever mine,
You are forever mine.

Intro to and Bible Reading 3

In the sermon, Jesus will reference this Old Testament story that takes place when the people are traveling out of Egyptian slavery and toward the promised land. Edom was a nation descended from Esau, while Israel descended from Esau's brother Jacob. So these were brother nations. Israel asked permission to travel through Edom, being careful not to harm any fields, or use any resources, or pay for what they did use. Edom refused, and displayed a powerful army, and the Lord commanded not to even try to take a foothold there. After the death of Aaron and an eventual victory in battle against the Canaanites, we pick up the story,

See Numbers 20:14-29, Genesis 36:1, and Deuteronomy 2:4-6

Then they set out ... along the Red Sea Road, a detour around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient and irritable as they traveled the long journey. They spoke out against God and Moses. "Why did you drag us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness? There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!"

So the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died. Then the people came to Moses and cried out, "We sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take away the snakes." Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD told him, "Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to the top of a pole. All who are bitten will live if they look at it!" So Moses made a snake out of fiery copper and attached it to a pole. Anyone bitten by a snake who then looked at the copper snake lived.

Numbers 21:4-9 (NLT, MSG)

Sermon Prepare – for Forgiveness

God directs his people to take a longer, harder route to the promised land. This was at least the 4th time the recently liberated people got impatient, (literally short-souled, the opposite what is sometimes translated in the New Testament as long-suffering. Poisonous snakes, (literally, fiery serpents (seraphim)), perhaps because they were red, perhaps because they were messengers of God, or more likely, because of the poison's burning sensation as it entered the body, teaching the survivors the error of their attitude; and Moses puts what most English translations call bronze or brass but it could also be copper (a key ingredient of

bronze and brass) (All three are the same word in Hebrew) – One commentator who believes it is copper because it would most resemble the fiery snakes (and archeological evidence of such copper snakes support that). But whichever medium it is is not critical – It isn't going to work if it is one metal and not if it is another – that is not what it is about – it is an image to remind them of their faith *toward God*, and they would be healed if they looked to it after they were bitten.

As the event is expressed by the ancient writers, the story is filled with theological problems. But I'll follow the model of Jesus who ignores all those problems and pulls from the story only one point – how we find healing. This story comes up in a conversation with Nicodemus. (See John 3:1ff) Jesus says you cannot see the kingdom of God unless you are born again. Nicodemus asks, how can a person be born when they are old? Jesus says they must be born of God's Spirit. Nicodemus asks, "How does that happen? And Jesus uses the snake story to weave his answer:

And as Moses lifted up the [copper] snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. (John 3:14-15) (NLT)

Just as those in the desert experienced the penalty of death because they sinfully rebelled against God who they forgot had done so much for them -- they were to look up at that symbol of death, and remember God, and trust God, and be healed. They would, as a hymn writer put it – Look and Live (Look and Live, Ibid). Now, Jesus explains, the people would look at him lifted up, put their faith and trust in him, and be born to new life. Nicodemus would not understand this yet, but Jesus is referring to being lifted up on the cross, lifted up from the grave, and lifted up (ascending) to the throne of God in heaven. And as people looked on that Roman symbol of death they would remember God, and what he did in Jesus, and believe, and be healed from the power and penalty of their sins. We would, as the hymn writer put it: find a precious healing stream of love and mercy and light – (Near the Cross esp. v 3 by Fannie Crosby) a symbol that informs us how to live daily.

As we lift our eyes to the cross, there are 3 things to remember.

We remember the cost. Ron Rand wrote about Michael. **Remember the cost** Michael took his family on an outing each week. When they returned home, they'd make a fire in the fireplace and pop popcorn. One evening, little Billy was disobedient and so was sent to his room while the rest of the family got the fire and popcorn going. Once they got it all started, Michael went to Billy's

room and said, “You go out with the others, I’ll stay here and take your punishment.” Through this action, the entire family experienced a small, but vivid example of what Jesus did for everyone. (*For Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven*) When we look at the cross, we remember that Jesus perished so we would not have to. This is the next verse, you know it well.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 NKJV)

We remember the cost, we also remember the love when we see the cross. Despite the Old Testament snake story, **Remember the love** Jesus makes it clear in this conversation with Nicodemus that God loves us beyond what we can fathom. Some people look at all that is going on in their life, in the world, and act and speak as if God’s power and/or love is still on trial. But Christ was already arrested, tried, hung and crucified, and God’s verdict (the resurrection) has already passed the test of time. For as the next verses say,

God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. (John 3:17-18a) (NLT)

We remember the cost, we remember the love, we remember to respond. It is not God who is on trial, but **Remember to Respond** it is we who are on trial for how we will or will not respond to God. We must remember to respond.

In November 1829, postal clerk George Wilson committed robberies that endangered drivers of the US Mail. For this first-time offense, he pleaded not guilty, but the court convicted and sentenced him to death. Later, he withdrew his not guilty plea. Public sentiment against capital punishment at that time initiated a movement to secure a presidential pardon, not for the prison term, but for the death penalty. President Jackson granted a pardon. Wilson refused it. The Supreme Court had to decide if this was even possible to do that. They determined that a pardon is a deed that is only valid when tendered. A prisoner cannot receive any advantage from a pardon without presenting it before the court. When the court asked if he had anything to say, and if he wished to avail of the pardon; he answered he had nothing to say and did not want to avail himself of the pardon. If the pardon is not presented, the Supreme Court determined they could discover “no power in a court to force [a pardon] on him.

Jesus goes on to say that he was sent and came to offer pardon and create for himself a people who will receive and offer forgiveness. So we have to accept it, we have to respond to the cost and love that he showed on the cross. Will we discover and offer his forgiveness? Or will we be like those who choose to not believe in Jesus, who love and desire to hide sin more than find grace and forgiveness? and by so doing, in essence, refusing the pardon offered and are already judged. (See John 3:18-20)

But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.” (John 3:21 NLT)

And what God wants is forgiveness. We heard Jesus warn us to be careful about **What God wants is forgiveness** tempting others into sin, how we are supposed to be dealing with our own sin problem, and to go out of our way to fix sin’s disunity and dissension. Like our ancient grumbling travelers, we fail multiple times, and we need to be able to *receive and offer forgiveness multiple times*. Nevertheless, being sorry has always meant that we truly regret (not just getting caught if we are caught) but truly regret the act we have done or the words said (or not done or said) and will strive to correct the situation and do our best not repeat that action or words or inaction in the future.

We also heard Peter ask about the depth and width of forgiveness. How many times do we **Forgiveness Depth and Width** have to do this? And he suggested an answer of 7. The 1st century standard was three. The assumption was if it happened a 4th time -- well, they probably weren’t truly sorry in the first place. Is it reading too much into the copper snake story to note that this is the 4th time they rebelled against God? Maybe, maybe not. Peter more than doubled that graciousness of his time when he suggested 7 times. But Jesus answer makes us stop. It is not meant as a literal number to tracking at all. There are no limits to our striving to be willing to forgive.

If the number of times isn’t limited, the next thing we want to figure out are the small print **Forgiveness Loopholes Defined** – the loopholes, what are the exceptions to the rule? In the New Testament, the word “forgive” is not a passive sentiment. It is almost a violent act of dismissal. It means "to send off," "to hurl," "to release," "to let go." It is an active process that

declares, "I will attempt to go on loving the life in you, the divine in you, the soul in you, even when I totally abhor what you have done (to me). What's more, I will attempt to see your life as having value just like my own, even when I don't agree with what you have done and even if what I perceive you stand for is different course of life than I am." In other words, Jesus says forgiveness is limitless and loophole-less. And it sounds as absurd now as it did then. Then to illustrate this, Jesus tells a parable of the servant with an insurmountable debt. We heard the first half of that parable, the man came out of the king's office free to dance and live and we sang that. But that was only half the story, here is the rest of the story.

"Later, that same servant found another servant who owed him a few dollars. [The number was equal to the wages of one manual laborer working one day] The servant grabbed the other servant by the throat and demanded instant payment, 'Pay me the money you owe me!'

"The other servant fell on his knees and begged him for a little more time, 'Be patient with me. I will pay you everything I owe.'

"But the first servant couldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put into prison until the debt could be paid in full. All the other servants saw what happened. They were very upset. So they went to the king and told him all that had happened.

"Then the king called in the servant he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I told you that you did not have to pay anything because you begged me to forget what you owed. I had mercy on you. Shouldn't you have had the same mercy on your fellow servant that I had on you?' The master was very angry, and he sent the servant to prison to be punished until he could pay everything he owed. "This king did what my heavenly Father will do to you if you do not forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

Matthew 18:28-35 (ICB, NLT) Words in brackets are commentary and not quoting the Bible.

Jesus teaches limitless loophole-less forgiveness in the kingdom of God, and if you can't do that, you can't be in the kingdom of God, because otherwise it doesn't work. We need to receive the grace God gives and we need to share that on to others. Peter's proposal, though generous, still allows us to ruin society by having limits, loopholes, or exceptions, and therefore it is not going to work unless everyone in the society is working on it.

And it gets really complicated because we live in a society where not everyone is trying to live by the 10 and the 2, if everyone was, we wouldn't have the big need for forgiveness like we have now. So it is difficult to live the kingdom in a world that doesn't live the kingdom values. How do you balance holy justice and unlimited,

loophole-less forgiveness and grace, and still make the world a better place?

That's beyond my figuring out. How many mulligans do we give people? If it is me golfing, it better be a whole lot! 😊

But is that the kind of God and kingdom we want? Which do we want? An escalation of unforgiveness or an escalation of forgiveness? An escalation of revenge? An escalation of letting it go? An escalation of judgment and hate? Where will it ever end?

God's kingdom is based on an escalation of mercy and pardon. As God is limitlessly merciful to us, we *are* merciful to one another. Forgiveness must spread and escalate from individual choices to form a way of living in community. There is an unbreakable bond between the forgiveness of God and the forgiveness we are to offer one another, making it illogical and impossible for us to accept the mercy of the Lord and then refuse to extend mercy to others. Jesus summarizes this in the Lord's Prayer – we say it every Sunday, "Forgive us our debts, or trespasses, or sins; as we forgive those who are indebted to us, trespass against us, who are sinning against us" (Matthew 6:12). That is what we ask of God.

The kingdom of God is not about receiving what we deserve -- justice meted out to sinners; but it is about the character of God, under whom we can move into a community together. The character of God is wrapped up in limitless grace and mercy and love. If we want to live in his kingdom, then we will follow that culture, which is to display overwhelming heart felt mercy to others because that is what we have received from God.

Therefore, as we, and people, struggle with sin and its consequences, and all the complications because we don't live in that kind of a kingdom everywhere, finding forgiveness for ourselves and offering it to others -- we can only find hope when, through our heart's eye of faith, we see Jesus lifted up, trusting that he is saving, he is restoring, he is healing, he is transforming. He will never change his mind about our process and progress. His faithful love endures forever. He will help us move more fully into his realm of forgiveness where we will find God is already there forgiving us and helping us find forgiveness in our hearts for others.

Invitation to the Water with Prayers and Meditation

Let's pray. Lord, as we picture you lifted up, as we remember what you did for us, we consider today's question that we put on our paper, **Is there something or someone for which I need to receive forgiveness? Is there something or**

someone for which I need to become willing to forgive? (Repeat question) Or perhaps there is something more pressing in your life that you need to put in your paper prayer. Now Lord, we ask that you search our hearts. We realize we are still traveling in the wilderness. We are learning your way and praying that by your strength we are getting better at following. Yet the closer we follow, the more aware we become of how much more we must learn, and how much farther we have to travel to truly live the prayer, “Forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors”.

As you are lifted on the cross, in your wounds we see our wounding, in your cries of anguish we hear our angry complaining, in your torn flesh, we see the lashes we inflict on others and on you. Have mercy on us. In your compassion, forgive our sins. We know we’re still broken, but we also know that by your forgiving grace, we pray that we’re getting better, more loving, more like Jesus. As we come to the living water [pour water into bowl] and our papers dissolve in prayers to you, may you restore and improve our relationships with you and with one another. As we hear the instrumental music, guide us to what we need to be and do. Drive us to your cross and move us further on your path as we faithfully look up to you. Keep us faithful to our journey’s end when we will finally feast with you in your new creation. [Instrumental Music while people bring their prayer papers to the bowl]



Music Our closing song will probably be familiar to you if you listen to praise music on the radio, but it is new to us in this setting. But it reminds us that as we look to the cross what we should see is amazing grace and unfailing love that breaks the power of sin and darkness,



because unlike the animals sacrificed in the Old Testament, the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, is worthy to pay the cost in full, and it is by his death and resurrection that we are free to receive new and eternal life. If comfortable, let’s stand and sing along as best you can with us – This is AMAZING Grace....

This is Amazing Grace

Words and Music: Jeremy Riddle, Josh Farro, Phil Wickham

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Who breaks the power of sin and darkness?
Whose love is mighty and so much stronger?
The King of Glory; the King of above all kings.
Who shakes the whole earth with holy thunder?
Who leaves us breathless in awe and wonder?
The King of Glory; the King above all kings.

Chorus

This is amazing grace, this is unfailing love;
that you would take my place, that you would bear my cross.
You would lay down your life that I would be set free --.
Jesus, I sing for all that you've done for me.

Who brings our chaos back into order?
Who makes the orphan a son and daughter?
The King of Glory; the King above all kings.
Who rules the nations with truth and justice;
Shines like the sun in all of its brilliance?
The King of Glory; the King above all kings.

Chorus

Worthy is the lamb who was slain.
Worthy is the king who conquered the grave.
(Three Times)

Worthy is the lamb who was slain; worthy, worthy, worthy!
Chorus

Series Blessing Now having experienced the joy of forgiveness, Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.

18th Cent. aphorism, attr. to John Wesley

Go to the World

Words: Sylvia G Dunstan, © 1991 GIA Publications, Inc.

Music: Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906

Go to the world! Go into ev'ry place.
Go live the Word of God's redeeming grace.
Go seek God's presence in each time and space.
Alleluia. Alleluia.

Pstr: Amen. **C: Amen**