

On Forgiveness

Theology Thoughts: Part 3 “On Forgiveness”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 8, 2023

19th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Micah 7:18-20; Colossians 3:12-17; Matthew 18:21-35

Reflection: Psalm 130

Greeting: Make your ways known to me, Lord; Teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth. Because you are the God who saves me. I put my hope in you all day long! Praise the Lord!

Prayer: God, bless us in love and help us to show mercy. May we reflect the love and grace that we have been shown in our lives through how we live. Help us to listen to your word and guide us in your ways. May you help us to slow down so that we may love our neighbor and may show our love for you. Grant us wisdom that we may learn the lesson you have for us today. Let us walk in your truth that we may share that truth with the world. We thank you for your steadfast love and faithfulness. By your Spirit help us to help one another. We pray that you will continue to help us grow in mercy and grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities. (Psalm 130 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 130, and we hear of God’s great capacity for mercy. That we are forgiven by God’s great love. That we have been shown grace upon grace as a free gift from the Lord. What does it mean to you to know that you have been forgiven? How have you shown others forgiveness? In the week to come, how can you share the love of Christ with those around you? What are some ways that you can show thankfulness for the mercy you have received? How can you share God’s love with the world? How may we join together to share the comfort and care of Christ?

Prayer: Lord, we turn to you because of your steadfast love. We know that even when we struggle you are with us. May your Holy Spirit guide us in truth and light. Help us to share the peace and love of Christ each and every day. As we come before you this day, we bring to you the joys and concerns of our lives that we have shared aloud together. We also turn to you in

prayer with the unspoken worries and celebrations of our lives. Help us that we walk in your ways and seek the path of righteousness. May you be with us to strengthen us in our gladness and our sorrow. We pray that you will help us to grow in love through our laughter and our tears. As we learn more about you, Lord, may we grow closer to you. May your steadfast love and faithfulness guide us all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Micah chapter 7, verses 18 through 20.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of his possession? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in showing steadfast love. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old. (Micah 7:18-20 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Colossians chapter 3, verses 12 through 17.

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear 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. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:12-17 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 18, verses 21 through 35.

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if my brother or sister 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. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him, and, as he could not pay, the lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But 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.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 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. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.' (Matthew 18:21-35 NRSV*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This So, I had trouble nailing down exactly which readings I wanted to use because there were so many different ones that came to mind when I thought about the way that we treat forgiveness. And I finally narrowed it down to the ones that I used for today. I wanted to look at the way we think about receiving forgiveness in relation to how we forgive. But sometimes it can be hard to take this and understand it in a way that's not transactional. Because it's easy to turn that into an exchange where we think about forgiving others only to get forgiveness for ourselves and it stops being from the heart. I wanted to address that because I think that when we make our theology transactional, we run into some of the issues that we talked about last week. That if we are looking at things transactionally then we start to run into issues of earning salvation and earning forgiveness, earning gifts that are freely given. I wanted to address it because we can get very, very complicated ideas of forgiveness, and we can let it distort what it really means to forgive. Our readings offer us a picture of forgiveness. Micah talks about God forgiving in a way that casts our sins away completely to be forgotten. Micah also highlights why God does this. It is out of God's love that we are forgiven. The example set for us is one that demonstrates the importance of forgiveness in our own lives. It's the reason that when we're told how to pray that we make forgiveness of others part of our lives. And it's the same thing we hear from Paul. When Paul thinks about being kind and compassionate, it includes forgiving others just as God has forgiven us. That our forgiveness is a sign of love, but for us to accept that love we must be able to show love. Because it's easy to reject it when we're so caught up in earning it. What it teaches us is that forgiveness is an act of love. And it's something that we do to show love.

We get another look at how we forgive in our Gospel reading. Peter wants to know how often he should forgive. He tries to go with what he thinks is a big number of times with seven. Jesus responds with an even bigger number with seventy-seven. Basically, the number is chosen to say that you shouldn't keep track because you just need to forgive. It's this idea of going well above and beyond what's expected. And the idea here is that forgiveness is something that we do both for ourselves and for others. That you forgive from the heart so that you can reflect the love that has been shown to you. That it is an act of love to forgive because it shows that you have received and understood the love being given to you. The parable that we get is really just about showing others the love that you have been shown. In our parable this man is brought before his master because he is being called to pay back a great debt. When he can't pay, he asks simply for more time to pay back this very large debt. The master has mercy upon the man and instead forgives the entire debt. Now that he's been shown this

kindness, what does he do with it? Does he demonstrate the love that has been shown to him? He comes across someone who owes him a debt, a small amount compared to what he owed the master. He demands payment from his fellow slave. He's then given the same plea he gave to the master. He is asked for patience in getting paid back. But he hasn't learned anything about mercy and love. He refuses to forgive the debt as he has been forgiven. He throws his fellow slave into jail until he's paid back. This makes it back to his master. The master calls him back and the master wants to know why he has not been willing to show the same mercy he was shown. He feels as if he has learned nothing. By refusing to be willing to show love and forgive others, he's basically saying that he doesn't want to be forgiven. And that's the point that's being made here. It is that, in essence, he is rejecting forgiveness because he refuses to see how he benefited and how it should transfer to others. And the entire account is just a way of telling others to forgive because you know the importance forgiveness has played in your life. Forgive because you know the love that has been shown to you and the difference it has made in your life. Not offering that to others is a sign that you have rejected that love as part of your life. That you have rejected being forgiven because you can't let go.

When I started thinking about this, one of the things that came to mind is that forgiveness is something that we do for ourselves. I don't mean that as a selfish thing. I mean it in the sense that it lets us let go of things. It lets us show love. Because you can't control what someone else will do with the gift that you give. Because forgiveness is saying that you don't want to be paid back. And you might wonder what that means if you've been wronged. It means you don't want retribution or restitution. When we think about an eye for an eye, that is wanting to be paid back for some way that you have been wronged. Forgiveness is saying "I don't need anything in return. I can forgive the debt that is owed." Now I phrase it like this because one of the things that can stop us from being able to forgive is the idea that we forget or that we are saying things are okay, and that's not what forgiveness is about. We may not be able to forget, and I'm here to tell you that is OK. Some may be surprised at this idea. How can you forgive if you still remember that you were hurt and wronged? Well, here's an example. I'll keep it simple so that it is easy to understand, even though forgiveness can be a complicated matter. Let's say I go out to dinner with somebody, and they tell me that they have forgotten their wallet. They can't pay now, but they will pay me back. So, I pay for their dinner. The weeks go by and more weeks go by and they still have not paid me back. So, I tell them not to worry about paying me back. I forgive that debt. Does it mean that I'm not upset? No. I can be upset if they were supposed to pay me back and they didn't. I may be more wary about eating out with them again until I can come to terms with that. But if I'm waiting for them to pay me back, I'm going to continue to fester over it. It's only going to get worse and not better. Because I'm going to think about how they have not paid me back and I'm still expecting to get paid back and I will never be able to move on until I let go of it. So, I forgive the debt. Maybe that act of kindness will make them think about how much they might value that friendship. Now they may do something to try to make sure they salvage the friendship because they've understood an act of love has been shown to them. Which is good. But today I'm going to tell you what it

does for you. You stop festering over it. You stop worrying about it. You stop obsessing. Because it has been about what you are owed. Has anything actually changed? You didn't have what you were owed before and you don't have it after. But that's part of it. Because you're willing to say you don't need to be paid back. What you have gained is peace. Because you're willing to say that it's out of your hands and you don't need to be paid back. It lets you move on with your life. If the issue comes up again, you might be hesitant. That's understandable. When we get hurt, it can be hard to forget. That is part of wisdom, so that we can avoid being hurt again. We cannot always forget, but being able to forgive lets us move on with our lives in love. And maybe it helps somebody move on with theirs.

Like any good act, I pray that any act of love turns into more acts of love. But I know that if I do something in kindness for someone else, that I have done the right thing. My conscience is clear. I may lose sleep wondering if somebody else is going to pay me back for what I'm owed, but I have never lost sleep over doing the right thing. We are called to forgive as we are forgiven because it sets us free from an endless cycle of being in debt. The debt of action, the debt of things, the emotional debts that we feel we are owed. Because forgiveness sets our hearts free so that we can love again freely. That we can share the love of Christ with the world. That we let Christ bring us peace. Because that call to forgive as we are forgiven is a reminder of the love that has been shown to us and a reminder of the love we can show. Because when God forgives us, the entire idea is that we are forgiven so that we can forgive because we take that love, and we multiply it and we share it. And so, when we talk about forgiveness, I want us to think about it not as something that we owe to be forgiven but something that we do to acknowledge the love shown to us. And it's something that we do to share the love of Christ as part of our lives. Something that we do to set our hearts free. If it helps others, that is good. But our forgiveness isn't dependent on if others accept it or not. Our forgiveness isn't dependent on others learning a lesson. Because I pray that they do, but I also know that what I do is on me what you do is on you. If others see the love of Christ in our lives and want to share that love, then good! I pray others will seek love because of it. But if we love, we have done the right thing. We forgive as we are forgiven because we know just how powerful that is for us and for others. Because it is a gift that is freely given. So let us live a life of forgiveness and love, that our hearts may be free to walk with Christ all the days of our lives. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Theology Thoughts

Our current series is going to be a collection of theology thoughts from Pastor Cameron. Each week we will explore different aspects of how we live our faith. We will be looking at faith, prayer, works, forgiveness, scripture, and more. The more we learn about God, the more we grow in faith and love.

Next Week: On Forgiveness – Our next message will look at both seeking forgiveness and granting forgiveness, and seeing how they are related.

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Tom Finley
Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert
Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Connie Brown
Marsha Overton	Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox
Taylor Waldorf	Harriet Tucker	Becky McGuiness	Janet Yokum
Donna Farley	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser
Larry Thompson	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	

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