

Daily Devotions

Monday September 18

Genesis 50:15-21

¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" ¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

For Reflection

This passage at the end of the book of Genesis beautifully summarizes a key theme of the whole Bible. Joseph has risen to a role of prominence and leadership, and his brothers who treated him badly in the past are afraid that he'll seek revenge now that their father has died. But Joseph surprises them with his lavish forgiveness and grace. He tells his brothers, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today" (v. 20). That theme echoes down through Scripture, all the way to the cross of Jesus. Even though humans intended to put the Son of God to death, God intended it for good by raising him up to new life. Through Jesus' cross and resurrection, we receive God's lavish forgiveness, grace, and love. I recommend you hold tightly to Genesis 50:20 in your heart. Whenever you start to doubt God's forgiveness, or God's power to transform something bad into something good, remember this verse: "God intended it for good." This promise from Scripture was true for Joseph's brothers, and it's true for you as well.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you remember about Joseph's life story? If you'd like to read about how God was with Joseph in bad times and good times, from the time he was a child through the time of his death, read Genesis 37-50. Remembering the context of Joseph's life and seeing how he was faithful to God in all circumstances will make Genesis 50:20 even more powerful.
2. When is a time that God took something unfortunate in your life and made it into something good? How did that experience influence your faith?

Read Psalm 1-5

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for farmers, students learning about agriculture, and those who work in parks and natural resources. Pray for an abundant harvest and for all people to have healthy food and clean air and water. Pray that the Holy Spirit would encourage people throughout the world to live as good and faithful stewards of the world God made.

Tuesday September 19

Read Psalm 6-8

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for students, teachers, and schools staff beginning a new academic year. Pray for God's wisdom and joy to fill all those who work with young people in schools, day care centers, and other youth activities. Ask God to bless Reformation's Kids' Inc. program and the work of our Growing Young Team, that we might touch the lives of the young people in our day care and our congregation with the love and hope of Jesus.

Wednesday September 20

Psalm 103:8-13

⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.

¹⁰He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

¹³As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

For Reflection

This section of Psalm 103 reminds us to be thankful that God doesn't give us what we deserve. God loves us so much that he forgives our sins and pours out his mercy on us. This entire psalm is a call to praise the Lord, and the verses for today give us plenty of reason to thank God for his goodness and love. He doesn't keep track of our transgressions or hold them against us. Instead, he removes them "as far as the east is from the west" (v. 12) and allows us to have a fresh new start each day. How have you experienced God's forgiveness and steadfast love recently?

Questions for Reflection

1. In our current climate of conflict and contention over politics and other topics, how can you model God's qualities as described in this psalm: being slow to anger, compassionate, and gracious? What difference would it make in our society if more people aimed for these qualities in their speech and actions?
2. When someone sins against you and then seeks forgiveness, how quickly are you able to forgive and let go of your anger? How does this psalm teach or encourage you in that process? Spend a few minutes in silence, praying to God and asking for his guidance for a relationship or situation where you'd like to experience forgiveness and peace.

Read Psalm 9-11

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for the ministry of Reformation Lutheran Church, that we would be devoted to serving God, bearing witness to the Gospel so that others may come to believe, and serving our community so that we may bless others.

Thursday September 21

Romans 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those 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. ⁴Who 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. ⁵Some 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. ⁶Those 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. ⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If 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. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰Why 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. ¹¹For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

For Reflection

"You, why do you despise your brother or sister?" This question fits our world so well. We look down on people who vote differently than we do, or who handled covid differently than we did, or who watch different cable tv news stations than we do. In Paul's day, the Roman Christians were tempted to condemn those who followed different dietary standards or observed certain festivals. What he wants them to see is that each believer was striving to honor the Lord. If their worship or obedience wasn't everything it could be, that was God's business. Yes, fellow believers could offer encouragement or gentle correction, but not condemnation.

This does not mean that "anything goes." It does mean that as long as we are willing to be fully submitted to Christ in all things, we cannot break fellowship with each other over differences. The matters of diet and calendars that Paul mentions here were extremely important in

his day. But if unity truly comes from Christ, then while we will always need to discern errors, we cannot condemn or look down on those who are also committed to the Lordship of Jesus.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is a difference that you find easy to condemn? How does Paul's counsel change your attitude?
2. What would it look like if Christians who had differences (of race, or social class, or political leanings, or moral convictions) focused more on what unites us in Christ than on our differences? How might that help us either work out differences that actually matter, or to celebrate differences, like race or language, that don't need to be made the same?

Read Psalm 12-14

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for the spiritual growth of yourself and all our members, that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit, increase in our knowledge of God's will, and overflow in love for each other and the world around us.

Friday September 22

Matthew 18:21-35

²¹Then 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?" ²²Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, 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. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But 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.' ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow slaves saw what

had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

For Reflection

How should we handle it when someone hurts us? Matthew 18 makes it plausible to say that how we handle wrongs inflicted on us is a defining characteristic of Christian community. And our stance is to be one of forgiveness. Last week's reading gave us a process for handling faults: go privately to the person to attempt to resolve it; bring a witness if that fails; involve the Christian community as a whole if that fails. But the goal is always reconciliation that restores relationships.

In order for reconciliation to happen, though, no matter how well any "process" is followed, there must be a spirit of forgiveness. Peter detects this, and starts this week's Gospel reading by asking just how many times forgiveness must be offered. Jesus' response, "seventy-seven times," is symbolic: his followers are called on to forgive again and again and again.

I feel like it is important to note a few things (that will probably also make it into the sermon on Sunday): "forgiveness" doesn't mean "forgetting" or re-setting the relationship to what it was before the offense happened. It means releasing the guilt the other person bears. This makes it possible for trust to be rebuilt, but that is a separate process. In some cases, such as abuse, it may be simply too painful to re-establish a relationship. Jesus is not saying we have to be friends with people who have deeply wounded us! In the same way, if someone is unwilling to acknowledge their own role in a conflict, it may be very difficult to restore a relationship to what it once was.

None of these nuances, though, relieve Christians of the command to forgive. To forgive means we no longer require payback from the one who has wronged us. Forgiving someone who has wronged you also

releases you from the power they have over you. It is often a difficult, perhaps even painful, process. It can also be as simple, however, as merely choosing not to take offense when someone says something you object to. It can mean not being angry when someone sees things differently than you do.

Where does this kind of a heart come from? In the parable, the first servant owed an amount roughly equivalent to **150,000 years** of wages! The second slave owed the first merely a third of one year's wages. The point of the parable is that we have received so much more mercy than we could ever imagine. The grace needed to forgive the slights we receive from others is so much less than the grace God has extended to us. To become merciful to others, then, we should consider the great mercy we have been shown. To learn how to give mercy, we should focus our attention on the One who is infinitely merciful. He alone can change our hearts.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there someone you long to experience forgiveness from? What does it feel like to have it withheld? How does it comfort you to know that Christ never holds forgiveness back?
2. One of the most challenging aspects of reconciliation is that forgiveness must come from the heart. Have you ever wondered what the best way to handle a broken relationship is? How would it look to focus on your own heart, your own attitude towards the other person? What change would that make?

Read Psalm 15-17

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for peace in the world, especially in Ukraine. Ask God to sustain those who suffer under persecution for the name of Christ. Pray that all people would have freedom and good government.

Saturday September 23

Read Psalm 18

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for police, fire fighters, all emergency workers, health care workers, and those who serve in the military. Pray for farmers and those who transport food. Ask God to grant well-being to all in our community, and to stir up generosity to meet the needs of those who lack food, shelter, or other needs.

The Mission of Reformation Lutheran Church is to:

Invite our neighbors as Jesus invites us.

Engage in a community of graceful discipleship.

Equip our members to grow in faith and ministry.

Embody the love of Jesus in our world.