

THIRTY DAYS OF

Forgiveness

– PART TWO –



Part One of a Summer Devotional Series on
FORGIVENESS | REPENTANCE | RECONCILIATION

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Introduction

Brothers and Sisters,

This is the first of three devotional booklets for the summer – forgiveness for June, repentance for July, and reconciliation for August. Each booklet will contain 30 devotions on the theme of each month. Two hymns will be included in each booklet for you to memorize over the course of the month.

This month's theme is forgiveness. One way to translate the Greek word that we translate as "forgive" is "send away." This is the word that the king uses with the unforgiving servant as recorded in Matthew 18. He rebukes the unforgiving servant for not "sending away" the debt that was owed to him. May this devotional booklet on forgiveness comfort you in the assurance that God the Father has sent away your sin by placing it on the body of His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Your sins have been sent away, and laid on the body of Jesus Who is your sacrificial lamb.

May you read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest all of the Scripture readings, the hymns, and the meditations as you walk your pilgrim path with your brothers and sisters in Christ in the joyful experience of knowing that your sins have been sent away that you may be welcomed unto the realm of your Father in heaven.

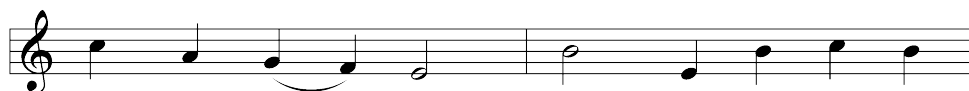
– Jesus' Sheepdog

From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee

Lutheran Service Book 607



1 From depths of woe I cry to Thee, In trial and
 2 Thy love and grace a - lone a - vail To blot out
 3 There - fore my hope is in the Lord And not in
 4 And though it tar - ry through the night And till the
 5 Though great our sins, yet great - er still Is God's a -



trib - u - la - tion; Bend down Thy gra - cious
 my trans - gres - sion; The best and ho - liest
 mine own mer - it; It rests up - on His
 morn - ing wak - en, My heart shall nev - er
 bun - dant fa - vor; His hand of mer - cy



ear to me, Lord, hear my sup - pli - ca - tion.
 deeds must fail To break sin's dread op - pres - sion.
 faith - ful Word To them of con - trite spir - it
 doubt His might Nor count it - self for - sak - en.
 nev - er will A - ban - don us, nor wa - ver.



If Thou re - mem - b'rest ev - 'ry sin, Who then could heav - en
 Be - fore Thee none can boast - ing stand, But all must fear Thy
 That He is mer - ci - ful and just; This is my com - fort
 O Is - rael, trust in God your Lord. Born of the Spir - it
 Our shep - herd good and true is He, Who will at last His



ev - er win Or stand be - fore Thy pres - ence?
 strict de - mand And live a - lone by mer - cy.
 and my trust. His help I wait with pa - tience.
 and the Word, Now wait for His ap - pear - ing.
 Is - rael free From all their sin and sor - row.

By Grace I'm Saved

Lutheran Service Book 566



1 By grace I'm saved, grace free and bound-less; My soul, be-lieve and
2 By grace! None dare lay claim to mer - it; Our works and con - duct
3 By grace God's Son, our on - ly Sav - ior, Came down to earth to
4 By grace! This ground of faith is cer - tain; As long as God is



doubt it not. Why stag - ger at this word of prom - ise?
have no worth. God in His love sent our Re - deem - er,
bear our sin. Was it be - cause of your own mer - it
true, it stands. What saints have penned by in - spi - ra - tion,



Has Scrip - ture ev - er false - hood taught? No! Then this word must
Christ Je - sus, to this sin - ful earth; His death did for our
That Je - sus died your soul to win? No, it was grace, and
What in His Word our God com - mands, Our faith in what our



true re - main: By grace you too will life ob - tain.
sins a - tone, And we are saved by grace a - lone.
grace a - lone, That brought Him from His heav'n - ly throne.
God has done De - pends on grace— grace through His Son.

- 5 By grace to timid hearts that tremble,
In tribulation's furnace tried,
By grace, in spite of fear and trouble,
The Father's heart is open wide.
Where could I help and strength secure
If grace were not my anchor sure?
- 6 By grace! On this I'll rest when dying;
In Jesus' promise I rejoice;
For though I know my heart's condition,
I also know my Savior's voice.
My heart is glad, all grief has flown
Since I am saved by grace alone.

Forgiveness & Day 16

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 10:1-22; Psalm 130

DEVOTION

Our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. This is all the work of Christ our crucified and risen Savior. He is the One Who does these two things for us that we may have life to the fullest here in time and in heaven unto eternity.

First, our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. Remember a few days ago how we meditated on the reality that Jesus was made to be sin, even though He knew no sin, so that in Him we may become the righteousness of God. Jesus takes our sins down to the depths of our very conscience. He doesn't just take the surface sins that make their appearance before everyone we know. Rather, Jesus took all the sins, even those secret ones, even the ones we don't know about, and claimed them as His own. He claimed them as His own and paid the price for them on the cross. Why? So that we may be delivered from an evil conscience and given a new and clean heart like we sing about in Psalm 51. To the depths of our very soul we are forgiven all our sins because Jesus took each and every one of them. He didn't leave one stone unturned. He didn't leave one sin behind for us to deal with later. Jesus assumed all our sins, from the top of our head to the bottom of our feet, so that we may be fully redeemed and saved from sin, death, world, and the power of the devil.

Our conscience is cleansed in the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus purchased this forgiveness for us on the cross, and we receive this forgiveness now in the means of grace, as often as we need it. Because our conscience is cleansed, our bodies are set aside now to live a holy life. We are sanctified, which means we are set aside to receive the holy things of Jesus and live a holy life in the image of our crucified and risen Savior. Our bodies and souls are washed with the pure water of Holy Baptism, and cleansed anew in Holy Absolution and the Sacrament of the Altar which returns us to the grace once given us in that forgiving flood. Everything that is done in Church is directed toward this forgiveness that cleanses our conscience and washes our bodies of all iniquity. Remember your Large

Catechism which says, "Toward forgiveness is directed everything that is to be preached concerning the sacraments and, in short, the entire Gospel and all the duties of Christianity. Forgiveness is needed constantly, for although God's grace has been won by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God's Word in the unity of the Christian Church, yet because we are encumbered with our flesh we are never without sin. Therefore everything in the Christian Church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and through signs appointed to comfort and revive our conscience as long as we live. Although we have sin, the Holy Spirit sees to it that it does not harm us because we are in the Christian Church, where there is full forgiveness of sin. God forgives us, and we forgive, bear with, and aid one another" (Large Catechism II.54-55).

Did you see what Luther did there? Did he say that Jesus hands out this forgiveness one time and then it's up to us to remain clean in this life? No; rather, Jesus comes daily that we may be cleansed and obtain that faith which justifies us unto life eternal. We are cleansed by Jesus habitually because everything is ordered in the Church so that we are delivered the gifts of the cross. We are in this Christian Church then by grace alone. We do not abide in the Church based on our merit, but solely because Jesus is patient and merciful to us, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. We then forgive as He forgives us, bear everything with our neighbor, and aid them in whatever they need mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. May the Holy Spirit continue to clean our hearts in the forgiveness of our sins and wash our bodies of every spot and blemish. May we do the same for our neighbor, knowing that it is not to gain God's favor, but rather because we are freed by God's favor and rescued from death and hell and we now delight in serving our neighbor in every physical and spiritual need. May the Holy Spirit daily remind us of this that we may be cleansed all our days until we are called home to heaven. Amen.

QUESTIONS

If your heart needs to be cleaned, what does this say about your heart outside of Jesus?

How does Jesus clean your heart and cleanse your body?

How does knowing and experiencing these two questions guide us in sacrificial love for our neighbor?

Forgiveness & Day 17

SCRIPTURE

2 Chronicles 33:1-19; Psalm 32

DEVOTION

Manasseh had a baptism of tears. You've heard the phrase of someone being baptized by fire, meaning they were plunged into the thick of a situation and had to learn how to deal with everything thrown at them. Manasseh was not baptized by fire, but rather had a baptism of tears. He did not listen to the Lord, but instead continued to worship false gods and sacrifice to them. He did not participate or share in the table of the Lord, but instead participated in the fellowship of demons. Not only did he worship these false gods, but he also persecuted those who desired to worship the one true God. When Manasseh would not listen to God, God disturbed his every day routine and sent him into exile in Babylon. Manasseh had to be rocked out of his plans in order for the patience of God to work on him and bring him to repentance in order that he could be transformed in the forgiveness of his sins.

Is this not the same with us all? Do we readily repent whenever we sin? Do we joyfully change our ways and conduct our entire lives according to the plans of the Lord? Do we walk by faith and not by sight? Or do we have those plans for today, tomorrow, next week, and until our final day? Like Manasseh, we worship the way we want to, and we strike anyone down who gets in our way. What does God do with us? He lays crosses on us to stop us in our tracks. It's like God comes and puts 1,000 pounds of garbage bags filled with glass on our backs which stops us. Even better, it's like God comes and just gives us a bag that we are able to bear, but still scrapes our shins and makes us cry out, "Why, Lord!" God disturbs our life in order that we may see that all those gods we worship are nothing but demonic forces seeking our downfall. He comes and disturbs our life so that we may see how much hate we have in our heart for our neighbor, even though we pretend that we don't hate anyone. May the Holy Spirit then work in our hearts the same repentance that He worked into the heart of Manasseh. May we repent and cry out to the Lord to forgive us and grant us His favor according to His mercy.

For God had mercy on Manasseh. Manasseh was brought back to Jerusalem and did three things. First, he built up the walls that he may defend the people of God. Second, he took down all the altars to false gods. Third, and most important, he restored the right worship to the one true God. Manasseh has full repentance which means that he had contrition over his sins, trusted in God's favor to forgive him, and then bore the fruit of that repentance by turning away from the demonic gods of this world and clinging to the mercy of God alone. God worked this forgiveness on Manasseh and transformed his life. The Lord no longer held anything against Manasseh and this freed Manasseh to worship God and love his neighbor. As it says in our psalm, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit."

Blessed are you, for the Lord has done the same for you. The Holy Spirit has worked repentance in your heart. Yes, this has happened by the Lord disturbing your life and bringing you to a place you would not have gone on your own. But it is in this place, in this depths of woe, that the Holy Spirit has turned your heart that you may trust in the mercy of God alone and cling to Jesus' cross alone and rest in Him unceasing. You are forgiven. You are blessed. The Lord counts no iniquity against you. The Lord holds nothing against you. You are free then to live your life in perfect faith toward God and love for your neighbor. Like Manasseh, you now live your life building up walls to defend the welfare of your neighbor. Like Manasseh, the Holy Spirit works in you that those idols may be torn down in your life and remembered no more. Like Manasseh, the Holy Spirit brings you to worship God the right way – in a passive way – in which you do nothing to please God, but instead receive forgiveness, life, and salvation freely for Christ's sake. May the Holy Spirit continue to work this in you, and may you remember: "Many are the arrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord." Blessed are you, for this trust is worked out in you this day in the meditation on God's Holy Word which is able to save your soul. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What can we learn from Manasseh about acknowledging our sins?

How does God work repentance in us?

What does forgiveness do to us?

Forgiveness & Day 18

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 4:25-32; Psalm 4

DEVOTION

There are two great commands that St. Paul, carried along by the Holy Spirit, wrote to the Ephesian saints and for us as well. First, he wrote that the sun must not go down on our anger, that we may not give an opportunity for the devil. The second, which conflicts with this, says that we are to be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgives us.

First, we are not to let the sun go down on our anger. What does this mean? It resonates with Psalm 4 which sings, “Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.” What does this mean? It means that you will have many things happen to you in life that will cause anger, but you are called out of darkness and into the light of Christ; therefore, you do not act on that agitation. You don’t deny that you are angry, but instead pray to God to forgive you your anger and take it from you. You cast your anger on your Lord Jesus that He may bear it for you. And what did Jesus do with your anger? He drowned it in His blood and buried it in His wounds, that you may be healed. Not letting the sun go down on your anger does not mean that you will never be angry, or never have occasion to get upset, but rather that you do not hold on to that anger and let it fester and therefore become part of your identity. Isn’t that what happens when you go to sleep angry? You continue to feed that anger and allow it not only to survive, but eventually take over how you view the people in your life. May the Holy Spirit take this from you, that your anger may be put to sleep and remembered no more. May you trust that the Lord has taken care of your anger, and those who have wronged you will have to deal with Jesus for their transgressions against you.

Jesus is the One Who will, on the Last Day, deal with those who sin against their neighbor and then abide in unrepentant sin. Jesus is the One with all authority in heaven and on earth Who judges both the living and

the dead. It is not for us to abide in anger as if we can be the judge, jury, and executioner of those who have sinned against us. Rather than abide in anger, we are freed from it that we may instead be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving each other as God in Christ forgives us. This is how the Holy Spirit works. He not only removes the wickedness that is natural to our corrupt flesh because of the fall into sin, He also and more importantly creates in us clean hearts that now delight in the ways of the Lord. To delight then means that we are not forced to act this way out of fear of being punished, but rather that the will and ways of Christ make up every fiber of our existence. Rather than anger compelling us from morning to night, we are led by Christ's love, His tender heart, and the forgiveness that He purchased and won on the cross for us. In everything in life we are freed from anger and instead possessed by tender love that is kind to our neighbor in forgiving them in the same way that God, in Christ, forgives us.

For God the Father has forgiven us in Christ. The Father's wrath is satisfied completely in the blood, wounds, and death of Jesus. We know this because Jesus cried out on the cross that our atonement stands finished. There is nothing we can add to the work of Christ the crucified. He has done it all for us. It is finished with the perpetual effect of our forgiveness. There is no wrath left over for us. Jesus consumed it all for us. On the cross, Jesus purchased and won salvation for you. You are forgiven. You are free. You are loved. This is the Father's kindness toward you. May this comfort you and guide you throughout the day today. Your Father in heaven, in Christ, in His sacrifice on the cross, forgives you all your sins. There is not one sin that Jesus did not die for on the cross for you. It's all purchased, and you benefit from Jesus' work because the Father is tenderhearted toward you. Be at peace then today, and may the Holy Spirit's love guide you in the freedom to forgive as God in Christ forgives you. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What happens when we let anger guide our days?

What happens when being forgiven by Jesus guides our days?

What happens when forgiving our neighbor guides our days?

Forgiveness & Day 19

SCRIPTURE

1 John 1:5-10; Psalm 32

DEVOTION

I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sins. We confess this in the Service of Confession and Absolution in Divine Service Setting Three. Our other reading for the day is used in the confession and absolution service from Divine Service Setting One. Both of these services in their confession tell us that it is not for us to deny our sinful condition or justify our actions, but instead we are gifted to repent and rejoice in the forgiveness that our faithful God grants to us freely by grace alone.

Remember how Psalm 32 begins. It begins singing, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.” The forgiven man, the one pardoned of all his sins, is the blessed one. To be forgiven means that the Lord holds nothing against you anymore. When you are forgiven, the Lord finds no fault in you. This forgiveness is by grace alone. Jesus purchased and won this forgiveness for you in His blood, wounds, and death. Your forgiveness, your pardon, is unmerited and therefore pure gift from your tenderhearted Father above. You are forgiven by grace on account of Jesus Christ alone. There is no other way to be forgiven. Remember our first reading that says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” We have sin. We are sinful and unclean. This is not who God created us to be, but because of the fall, this is who we are outside of Christ. We are not forgiven then because we have led a good life and tried to be as holy as possible. We cannot ever earn God’s grace. That denies the nature of grace itself. Grace is not earned favor, but unmerited favor, and this grace is gifted to us for Christ’s sake according to the Father’s mercy. It is not for us then to deny our sins or make excuses for why we do what we do. The only thing we are given to do is repent when called out by the law to do so. We are not given to explain ourselves to the Father nor justify our existence based on our

environment. We are given to repent, confess our sins, and wait faithfully for the Father to forgive us on account of Christ's life, sufferings, death, and resurrection.

For the text continues, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." We are forgiven not because we have earned God's grace by our works, but rather because He is faithful to His promise. The promise of the cross is the assurance for our forgiveness. You are forgiven because Jesus died in your place on the cross. He took all the punishment for every single one of your sins. He paid the price for your debt in full. You are forgiven. It is finished. Because Jesus died for you, the Father forgives you all your sins and cleanses you of all your actions. You are forgiven your inherited sin, and all the sins you commit actively and passively throughout your life. You are forgiven those active sins, those sins in which you sin against your neighbor. You are also forgiven those passive sins, those times in which you are sinned against and, instead of letting God deal with it, you get angry, grow cold, and even gossip about your neighbor to ruin their reputation in return. You are forgiven all of these because God the Father is faithful in being pleased by His Son alone and the sacrifice He made for you on the cross.

Rejoice then today my friends, and may you be quick to repent and slow to forget the forgiveness that Jesus purchased with His blood for you. May you walk as a child of the light this day in the full assurance that you are forgiven, loved, and claimed by Jesus your Lord Who will never leave you nor forsake you. Amen.

QUESTIONS

Why do we make excuses for our mistakes rather than just repent?

Is it because we fear the punishment of temporal authorities when we have wronged them?

Why do we make God the same? What are we forgetting about God when we act like He is the same as human beings when we sin against them? Hint, hint. Starts with a "C" and ends with a "ross."

Forgiveness & Day 20

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 8:46-51; Psalm 38

DEVOTION

Today we have Solomon and David, carried along by the Holy Spirit, teaching us the place that forgiveness has in the life of repentance. Remember yestermorn or yesternight, whenever you did the devotion, that the questions related to why we make excuses for our sins, rather than just repent of them. We usually make excuses for our mistakes in this life because man does not forgive as God forgives. Some people cut off ties with us when we sin against them, while others give lip service but still hold onto the trespass and begin feeding the grudge monster. Because of sin we project this feeling onto God Himself. We see how man deals with us, and how we deal with man, and we believe that God is the same with us. May the prayer of Solomon and the Psalm of David help us understand what it means to repent and be forgiven by our merciful God Whose ways are not our ways, nor His will our will.

Solomon helps us by pointing to God's mercy that leads us to repentance. Even though God disrupts our life to wake us up from our sinful progression, He does not leave us or abandon us. When God sends us into the exile of this demonic existence, He does not leave us but is patient with us. Solomon prays that even if God sends His children into exile because of their sins, He will be merciful and hear their pleas for deliverance. Remember the introduction to your Lord's Prayer from the Catechism, "Our Father Who art in heaven. What does this mean? With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." We do not pray to an angry deity who turns a blind eye and a deaf ear to our pleas, but rather to our merciful Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Who makes haste to help us in every time of need. We repent then not to someone who refuses to forgive us and would rather hold a grudge. Rather, we repent to our loving and true Father Who desires not our death, but that we may live,

come to repentance, and abide in the forgiveness purchased and won on the cross of Christ for us.

David, carried along by the Holy Spirit, shows us more so that we repent and are forgiven by our God Who does not forsake us. In verse 4 of Psalm 38 he prays, "For my iniquities have gone over my head, like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me." Do you remember anywhere else in Scripture where we hear this vocabulary? Remember Cain after he killed his brother Abel and God cast him out. What did Cain say? He said, "My guilt is too heavy for me." Our sins are too heavy for us to bear, as the law is always accusing us and revealing our sinful condition to us. Our guilt is more than we can bear. This is why Jesus, the Son of God, made haste to help us by taking the guilt of our sins and bearing them for us. Remember the greatest sermon every preached: Jesus the Lamb of God Who bears or takes away the sin of the world. On our own we groan and are heavy laden with our sins. The guilt is too heavy for us. Our exile in this world is too much for us. Because it is too much for us, we are crushed under the weight of sin, death, world, and the power of the devil who offer nothing to help us in our hour of deepest need. But when we are in this hour, the Holy Spirit gifts us where to look for aid, that we may be rescued from this life of misery. He points us to Jesus, the One Who has purchased assurance for us with the Father. Our salvation is absolute because the work for our deliverance is finished.

Take heart then today, brothers and sisters, for you are children of your loving God. You are not forgotten. You are not alone. You are not forsaken. Rather, you are forgiven. You are loved. You are claimed by Christ the crucified Who laid it all down that He may lift you up unto eternity. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What is the difference between God's will and our will? His ways and our ways?

How does Solomon's prayer and David's Psalm help us understand the nature of God?

How does God's nature help us while bearing the heavy load of our sins?

Forgiveness & Day 21

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 2:16-23; Psalm 75

DEVOTION

Forgiveness is not a worldly thing. When you observe nature, you do not see forgiveness. Darwin did not write the theory of forgiveness, but the theory of evolution with the notion of survival of the fittest. Bank loan departments do not base their procedures on forgiveness, nor do teachers grade final exams with the desire to pardon the student who skipped class every day. Forgiveness is not a worldly thing. Because of Jesus, we are not worldly things either.

Look at Paul's letter to the Colossians today. He doesn't say the word "forgiveness," but what he does say is that the saints there are not called to continue living in the manner from which they have been freed. The saints there were not to be judged by what they ate or what they touched. They were not to be judged, nor were they to judge others, by the laws from which they had been set free. They were not to say anything was unclean that Christ Himself had made clean, just like Jesus said to Peter as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Though this text may not have the word forgiveness in there, it does talk about the mindset of the baptized and how we now are judged and therefore also how we judge other people.

We are not judged by the law, for we have been made clean in Christ. The law no longer condemns us. This does not mean that we do not listen to the law and hear its rebukes. Rather, because we are forgiven, we are not condemned by the law any longer. We walk in the law with great delight, for it is the very fabric of our existence as children of God. The only way we walk in the law now is because we are in Christ. We are no longer worldly, but rather belong to Christ. We are not children of darkness, but sons and daughters of the Light. This is who we are. We are therefore not condemned by the law like the rest of the world because we

have been delivered in the waters of Holy Baptism and claimed by Christ the crucified.

Because we are no longer children of the world but sons and daughters of the King, we no longer walk as the world does. We are not judged by the world, and we do not judge as the world does. We do not judge even as the law does. When we speak the law, within our vocations to each other, we speak it in order that we may bring others to Christ in the forgiveness of their sins in the proclamation of the Gospel. We never preach the law to condemn alone, but that all may die and be gifted life in the preaching of the Gospel. So when St. Paul speaks this way concerning foods and teaching, he is guiding the Colossians and us as well to abide in our forgiven identity. The world may try to disqualify us, but we are not disqualified by the Father because we are in Christ. May we not be as the world is then and judge each other and disqualify one another. May we instead stop the indulgence of the flesh and fill each other up with the mercy that is ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

May this new mindset be yours today. You walk as a child of the Light. You are not cast out but welcomed in by the Father; therefore, your whole pilgrimage is welcoming others to walk alongside you and embrace the truth that all your sins are forgiven in the blood, wounds, and death of Jesus. May the Holy Spirit guide you into this truth today that you may remember that you are not disqualified, but loved, forgiven, and claimed by Jesus forever. You are not of this world but rather of the world that is to come. Forgiveness reminds you of that fact every day. Amen.

QUESTIONS

If forgiveness is not of this world, from where does it come?

How does this help us on our pilgrimage?

How does this help us with how we treat others on this journey?

Forgiveness & Day 22

SCRIPTURE

John 21:15-19; Psalm 133

DEVOTION

For the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. Thanks be to God. Jesus gave this life forevermore to St. Peter and we must focus on two things with this. First, Jesus restored Peter three times to absolve him of denying Him three times. After forgiving Peter, Jesus then said, "Follow Me."

First, Jesus granted life forevermore to St. Peter when He forgave him three times. Remember bold Peter told Jesus that he could never deny Him, but would go with Him into death, going so far as to chop Malchus' ear off in the garden of Gethsemane. However, when Peter was hard pressed by a little girl around a fire he quickly denied Jesus. Peter did so two more times, and then the voice of the law crowed at him and he despaired. Remember St. Luke records that Jesus looked at Peter and Peter ran out. Jesus did not physically look at Peter, but rather looked into Peter's conscience and the law condemned Peter and his denial.

What would you have done if you were Jesus? Can you imagine someone saying they have nothing to do with you? I know that I would cut that person out of my life and have nothing to do with them, and I bet you would do the same. Don't deny it. Instead, repent of thinking you're the best thing since sliced bread. Have you ever wondered what they said before sliced bread? I bet they said, "Thou art not the best thing since the printing press." However, that's a devotion for another day. Back to you and me. We are not the best, but we act like it. Let us confess that we are deniers like Peter who rely on Jesus' mercy alone for our salvation. For Jesus is not like us. He is not like this fallen world. He came and forgave Peter and restored him. He didn't tell Peter to go away, but installed him as an apostle. Jesus forgave Peter and placed him in his vocation to follow Jesus all his days until he would be crucified upside down for the glory of God alone.

After Jesus forgave Peter, He then said, "Follow Me." Remember your catechism that says that Jesus will carry us through this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven. Jesus does not forgive us and then send us out to live life however we see fit. Rather, Jesus forgives us and then beckons us to follow Him in thought, word, and deed. He calls us to follow Him in the forgiveness of our sins and in forgiving others as He forgave Peter. He calls us to follow Him and rejoice in those things of heaven. He calls us to follow Him and delight in the law of His Father alone. He calls us to follow Him and rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins above anything else in this life. He calls us to follow Him through death. He calls us to follow Him unto life eternal. Jesus forgives you, restores you no matter how many times you have sinned against Him, in order that you may follow Him unto the realm immortal, where there is life forevermore.

May the Holy Spirit guide you into this truth today, that like Peter, you have been and will always be restored in the forgiveness of your sins. May you be called by this forgiveness to forsake the ways of the world and instead follow Christ wherever He leads you in this life. May you rejoice in the things of Jesus, those things that last unto eternity. May others be brought into your life who have been likewise restored and called to follow Jesus, that you may dwell in true unity here in time, and in the new creation unto eternity. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What are the two stages of life forevermore being granted to you?

How does this teach you the purpose of the life of the Church?

Forgiveness & Day 23

SCRIPTURE

James 3:1-11; Psalm 67

DEVOTION

There is no better part of the body that teaches us the simul than the tongue. Remember the simul is that Lutheran, or better yet Biblical doctrine, that man is at the same time a sinner and a saint (*simul justus et peccator*). We are a sinner because of the fall into sin which does not excuse us to sin, as if we can just play the blame game on Adam, but rather proclaims the reality that from Adam flows sin that we ourselves actively and, outside of Christ, joyfully commit. However, in Christ we are a saint, forgiven all our sins, and cleansed of every spot and blemish that we may be presented before the Father perfect as He is perfect. The tongue shows us that we are a sinner, but also this same tongue speaks words of forgiveness on account of Jesus alone.

First, the tongue is sinful. Remember your James that says, "It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God." The tongue cannot be trusted when it is guided by our concupiscent nature and desires. When the tongue is led by our sinful flesh, then even when it is preaching God's Word, it can be using God's Word, rather than being a vessel for the Word of the Lord. The tongue cannot divide law and gospel properly in order that the sinner may abide in their forgiveness. The tongue may preach the gospel to justify sin, rather than the sinner, or the law to condemn the sinner without any hope of deliverance in the preaching of the Gospel. The tongue destroys friendships, ruins reputations, and spread lies. Then, the next day gives lip service to God by mouthing the Lord's Prayer and mumbling through the hymns. Repent with me my friends, for our tongues, outside of Jesus, are nothing but fire starters and our houses, churches, and jobs are dried up forests waiting to be set ablaze.

Let us not despair. For though our concupiscent tongues may seem like all there is, they are not. For Christ has assumed all of us, from the top of our head to the little piggy that went “wee, wee, wee, all the way home.” Jesus assumed our tongues and all the damage they have incurred. Jesus assumed our wicked tongues and didn’t use his. Remember, like a lamb that is before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He is the Lamb Who went uncomplaining forth to the cross and cried out nothing in His own defense. He did not defend Himself when He was the topic of gossip, but instead cried out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Jesus did not walk in step with us. He finished the work of atonement that our tongues may become what they are created to be. Our tongues are not created for death, but for life. Jesus gave this back to us when He spoke nothing but words of life and forgiveness from the tree of the cross. Yes, we must repent of our destructive tongues, but we repent to He Who uses His tongue to do nothing but pardon us of all our sins and encourage us toward everlasting life.

A salt pond cannot produce fresh water, neither can a sinful tongue produce forgiveness. Take heart then, brothers and sisters. Your tongues are not sinful, but cleansed in the forgiveness purchased and won for you on the cross. When your pastor speaks these words to you, he is not speaking with his own authority, but rather in the stead of Christ Himself. We believe and confess then that when the pastor absolves us, it is Christ Himself doing it. Therefore it is not the word of a sinful man, but rather the voice of your merciful God Who bespeaks you righteous. May the Holy Spirit speak this for you today, that your tongue may do nothing but build up and sustain all in your life in the full pardon and remission of their sins. For just as Christ has done for you, He does for others through you, that you may have further assurance that you have been and remain cleansed unto life eternal. Amen.

QUESTIONS

Why do words hurt more than sticks and stones?

How does Jesus reverse this damage?

Forgiveness & Day 24

SCRIPTURE

Mark 2:1-12; Psalm 103

DEVOTION

The same tongue that created all things is the same One Who forgives sins. Jesus revealed this to us as recorded in the Gospel according to St. Mark when He healed the paralytic. He said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven." When Jesus said this, the scribes grumbled because only God Himself can forgive sins. If a man forgives sins he is blasphemous because he is claiming to have the authority of God and to be God Himself. Jesus responded by asking if it was easier to forgive sins or to tell this man to get up, pick up his bed, and walk home. Jesus then performed the second miracle of giving the man the ability to walk in order that all may know that Jesus is God in man made manifest Who was sent, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world may be saved through Him.

Jesus does this work still today and it is doubted. Through His called and sent servant, the pastor, Jesus speaks words that absolve and forgive any and every sin. There is not one sin that Jesus did not die for on the cross; therefore, there is not one sin that the pastor cannot and does not forgive you. You are forgiven. It is not the pastor himself who speaks this, but rather the man placed into the office of the Holy Ministry, which was created by Jesus Himself to forgive and retain sin, speaking this freeing and forgiving message. You are forgiven. In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. You hear this every Sunday. This is God Himself speaking this to you.

Now the pastor is not gifted, at least not all pastors, with healing your physical illness and disabilities. However, the pastor does not need this proof to forgive you your sins. Rather, he does not point to himself, but to the Office Jesus mandated and instituted that forgives sinners their sins. Jesus created the office of pastor to be a forgiving office that locates

pardoning on this earth. This is not a manmade office, but a Divine one. This is the same as saying, "Pick up your bed and walk home." The pastor who absolves is declaring that he is God the Father's ambassador in the stead of Christ, in the same way that Jesus was sent to carry out the Father's will on earth.

May the Holy Spirit grant you faith to trust that the forgiveness spoken by the pastor is not his forgiveness, but Christ's forgiveness. You are forgiven, and your sins as far removed as the east is from the west. You don't have to wait until the last day to hear this message. You don't have to live in fear wondering if God loves you and will welcome you unto the eternal dwellings. Holy Absolution is the Last Day breaking forth into today ruining the surprise of your eternal life, but in a good way. Holy Absolution is the last page of the book read to you before the prologue so that you may with confidence read until the end knowing that your hero will see days to come. Take heart then. You are forgiven. You are loved. Your sins – those terrible sins – are forgiven and forgotten because of the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

QUESTIONS

Why do we doubt being forgiven?

What is Jesus' solution to this doubt?

Forgiveness & Day 25

SCRIPTURE

1 Timothy 1:12-17; Psalm 130

DEVOTION

Jesus saves the foremost of sinners. We all say this. We all say we believe this. We put these types of verses on our church signs. But, do we act like this? Do we really believe this? Do we believe that Jesus forgives the stripper? Do we believe that He forgives the abortionist? Do we believe that Jesus forgives the mother that drowns her four children because her post-partum depression was overwhelming? Do we believe that Jesus forgives all people? Do we forgive all people? Do we forgive and forget as we are gifted to do in the same manner as Jesus does for us? We are good at saying the chief of sinners is forgiven, but practicing this is another tale. There are two chief sinners we struggle with and they are our neighbor and we ourselves.

We struggle with our neighbor being forgiven, especially that concrete neighbor. We are good with abstract neighbors or hypothetical sinners, but make them real and we begin to struggle with God forgiving and forgetting their trespasses. Make that neighbor of real flesh and blood, with a name, and a vocation, and we struggle with them being absolved their sins and pardoned of all iniquity. Why is this? Because we struggle with our own sins. We mouth the words that we are forgiven, and we love the reality of unconditional love from God. However, if we truly believe that we are the chief sinner who is forgiven, we would gladly forgive all in our lives, even those toxic people who do nothing but damage us and destroy all whom we love and hold dear. If we believed that we are the chief sinner as St. Paul believed Himself to be, then we would have no issue in forgiving because we would know the deep nature of Christ's forgiveness for us.

But, I get ahead of myself. Who really is the chief sinner? Who is the One that is more sinful than all? Who is worse than an abortionist, a murderer, an adulterer, a thief, and every sin in between? Who is it but Jesus Christ, our Lord? On the cross, Jesus became Adam the gluttonous preacher, Cain the murderer, Rahab the prostitute, Judah the lustful, David

the adulterer, Peter the denier, Judas the betrayer, Thomas the doubter, Saul the persecutor, Chris the proud, Beverly the gossip, and every sinner in between. Jesus is the Chief Sinner Who did not deserve the title of sinner, yet claimed it as His own so that in this blessed exchange all sins become His in order that He may bestow His righteousness on all. Only when we understand this blessed exchange, that Jesus has become the worst of us, do we then abide in the freedom of being righteous according to His holiness. We are holy not because we have earned this existence, but because it has been imputed to us, and we are reckoned righteous according to Christ's grace. What does this mean? It means that Jesus is the worst sinner and has died to put it all to death. There is now no sin that is not forgiven. All is forgiven in Christ.

This then is the end of our struggle. Is even the worst of our neighbors forgiven? Yes, because Jesus assumed his sins and drowned them in His blood. Are we, even though we are the worst, forgiven? Yes, because Jesus drowned our sins in His blood. Jesus was found on the cross to be the lowest of the low, and there did the Father accept His sacrifice as the sacrificial Lamb destined to die for the sins of the world. All are forgiven. Even if one is to go their entire life and not believe, when granted the gift of faith that clings to the cross of Jesus alone, they are forgiven and welcomed into the eternal dwellings.

May the Holy Spirit guide you in this knowledge today. When you are struggling with forgiving someone, think about Jesus. If Jesus were to show up at your front door, you would welcome Him in and want Him to never leave. But think about it: He became that sinner that you hate. He became that concrete friend, family member, or fellow brother or sister in Christ with whom you have a grudge. When you see them, you see Jesus Who assumed their sins and made them His own, so that when you see your neighbor, you see them robed in Christ's righteousness that covers all their sins. And this is how they see you as well, for it is how your Father in heaven sees you. May this comfort you and free you today, that you may receive everything and everyone as gift from above. Amen.

QUESTIONS

Who is the chief Sinner?

How does this help us understand our forgiveness?

How does this help us forgive others?

Forgiveness & Day 26

SCRIPTURE

Habakkuk 2:1-4; Psalm 49

DEVOTION

Habakkuk is quoted by St. Paul in his opening chapter to the saints in Rome. St. Paul quoted this because this is one of the most defining verses in all of Scripture. This verse, “The righteous by faith shall live,” sets up a distinction and difference between those who cling to their works and those who cling to the work of Christ alone.

The one who lives by his works trusts and clings to his own righteousness. Luther says this is the most subtle of all gods in this life. In the Large Catechism, Luther sets up many different gods that we have. We trust in Mammon, or worldly goods and possessions to give us comfort in this life. Luther then ends this section by saying that the most subtle god that we fear, love, and trust above all things is our own righteousness merited by our works. For example, when a husband has sinned against his wife, rather than trust that she will forgive him, he tries to gain her love back by buying flowers, chocolates, rose wine, and streaming her favorite Sylvester Stallone movie for a date night. We all do this. Even our church attendance is a work that we trust in when pondering the love of God. We look and see how many times we missed church and compare it to how many Sundays and additional services we attended. We trust in the god of participation grading when it comes to our righteousness. Let us repent of this and face the fact that we naturally trust in our works over and against the work of Christ and Him crucified.

Against this god is the one true God and His method of saving us, which makes us passive receivers of His grace according to His mercy. Rather than being saved by our works, we are saved by faith or trust in the work that Jesus finished for us on the cross. For the problem with our works is that they are always going to be tainted by our sins. We will never perform a perfect good work because we will never, in this life, rid ourselves of our sinful flesh. However, with the work of Christ there is that

perfect work because Jesus is the unblemished and spotless sacrificial lamb Who gave up His life as a ransom for many. This one-time sacrifice for the life of the world is that to which we cling and therefore live by faith alone. We live by this faith and are therefore righteous because we are covered by the sacrifice of Jesus. On the cross, Jesus purchased this righteousness for us by assuming all our sins, dying for them in our stead, and now in this blessed exchange granting us His holiness by grace alone. Now in the means of grace, He continues to act by grace alone by bringing us the benefits of the cross, rather than making us earn them on our own. The reality that Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Holy Absolution, the Gospel preached, and the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren exists is an apologetic against righteousness according to our works. No, we are always saved by grace through faith alone.

May the Holy Spirit free you from any trust in your own works to save you. May that subtle god die a public death so that you may follow him no more. Instead, may you be humbled in the forgiveness of your sins to cling to Jesus' cross alone and rest in Him unceasing. May you always live by faith then, that you may walk in righteousness all the days of your life as your Lord Jesus carries you through this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What does righteousness by works give you?

What does righteousness by faith give you?

Who works out this righteousness for you and in you?

Forgiveness & Day 27

SCRIPTURE

Luke 7:36-50; Psalm 103

DEVOTION

He who is forgiven little, loves little. Now, there are no small surgeries. When I am talking with someone they may say they are having minor surgery. But, you never know what could happen with something routine that the medical world says is a minor surgery. You don't know if you will have a reaction to some medication, be allergic to the material of the tool being used, or have high anxiety over the issue that causes a stress-induced heart attack. There are no small surgeries. In the same way, there are no small sins. The only time sin is small is when we make it small.

The only time sin is small is where we make it small. And do we not do this all the time? Now, there are some sins that we still like to be big, especially if they are a hypothetical sin to us. We love that homosexuality, abortion, murder, and theft are still big sins. But, come on! Does Jesus really care if I tell a story about something I heard to a fellow believer in the narthex before we go into the nave to receive the gifts that Christ freely gives? Does Jesus really care if I go 15 over in a school zone? Does Jesus really care if I ignore my wife and kids while scrolling on Facebook or tending to that hobby of mine that is ever so important to round out my lovely personality? Of yes, we make sins very small because we don't want to admit that we are just as sinful as those big sinners out there. We would like to think that Jesus died for something really bad we may have done, but we ignore all the little things we have convinced ourselves are not big deals. But remember, the less you make of your sin, the less of a Savior Jesus is for you. For he who is forgiven little loves little. He who does not believe that there is much to be forgiven him does not believe that Jesus is that great of a Savior. For when we water down sin, we water down the atonement and the price for our sins. When we belittle sin, we belittle the sacrifice that Jesus made in our stead, to pay for our sins on the cross.

When we water down our sins, we water down the work that Jesus finished for us on the cross. However, this does not belittle what Jesus did. Our faith does not make the atonement the atonement. Jesus' death is for the life of the world even while we were still being sinful. Our faith does not make Jesus' death, but instead receives the benefits of His death. May the Holy Spirit grant us to see our sins for what they are, not too small so that they need no forgiveness, and not too large so that they cannot be forgiven. May we have that sin that is just right so that we may know Who Jesus is for us and for our salvation. May the law then continue to reveal our great need for a Savior, and may the Gospel be preached purely that shows us the wounds of Jesus for our deliverance from sin, death, world, and the power of the devil.

May this good work continue for us, that we who are forgiven much may love much as well, and desire to spend our days granting that love for the good of our neighbor. May we joyful cry and wipe away our neighbor's filth that they may be perfect as we are perfect in the forgiveness of our sins. Let us learn from the woman who was forgiven and be saved not by our love, but by our faith in Christ's love for us that then lives out in love for our neighbor. May this guide you today and all your days. You are forgiven, from the sins you have made small to those you thought could never be forgiven. You are loved, no matter how unlovable you feel. You are claimed and destined for the realm immortal because Christ has taken your sins and removed them from you as far as the east is from the west. Amen.

QUESTIONS

Why do we make our sins small?

Does this change what Jesus did on the cross for us?

How does knowing all of this give us a better life together with those God has placed in our lives?

Forgiveness & Day 28

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 103; Jeremiah 31:31-34

DEVOTION

For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more. As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. These are two passages I used one time when discussing the nature of God with a brother in Christ. He was trying to say that God does remember our sins, in order that we never make the same mistake again. He was projecting a worldly practice onto the Divine. Do we not say that we can forgive, but we must never forget? If we forget something, then we could be fooled against and sinned against again. Rather than saying, "Remember the Alamo," we say, "Remember Jill who gossiped about me, I'm never going to tell her anything again. Remember Bill, he totaled my car when he borrowed it, so never again does he get the keys to the Civic." On the cross Jesus did not just take your sins and put them in a safe place, He drowned them in His blood. He put them to death. The debt is cancelled and paperwork shredded. God remembers your sins no more. They are removed as far as east is from the west. This is the reality of what God in Christ has done for you. Why then did this brother want God to remember sins? Why make God do something that fallen man does, but shouldn't?

Some want to make God remember sins because it makes them feel as if they now have a reason not to commit that sin again. God remembers the sin, and brings it to your mind, so that you remember not to do it again. Is this how we are saved? Are we destined for the realm immortal because we only sin once, and then avoid the sin again? Of course not, for then salvation would be by works, rather than in Christ alone. But salvation is in Christ alone. It is never in our works. On the flip side, we are not condemned because of the lack of works. We are not condemned when we are forgiven in Christ. Our lack of works does not condemn us. This does not mean that we just sit and do nothing in life, rather we do not despair when the works aren't apparent. Our gaze is never toward our works, but

instead always toward the work of Christ and Him crucified. When we think that God remembers sins, we water down the work of Christ and elevate our own works to merit God the Father's favor. Let us despair of this unbiblical doctrine and hear again the words of the Holy Spirit through the Prophet Jeremiah which say, "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more." Can't get any clearer than that. Your sins are forgiven and forgotten by Jesus. God the Father remembers them no more. They are put to death by the wounds of Jesus. They are dead and gone, with no tombstone erected for remembrance. Every time then when we remember the death of Jesus when we eat His Body and drink His Blood, we remember His death and the forgottenness of our sins.

However, we still remember our sins. God has forgotten them, but we still remember them. Not only do we remember others' sins against us, we remember our sins against them. This is why Psalm 103 is brilliant for us, because no matter how far and wise we search, we will never be able to find our sins. It's like we go in one direction, and our sins are always behind us; even when we turn around, they are still behind us. We will never be able to reach out and find our sins. Jesus has removed them as far as the east is from the west. We cannot cast a line far enough to lure those sins back into the boat with us. They are gone. They are lost. They are finished in the death and resurrection of Jesus. There is no bounds to how far God removes our sins from us. They are gone. Never to be found. Thanks be to God for that.

May the Holy Spirit bring these two wonderful texts to your mind throughout the day whenever you are holding onto someone who has sinned against you, or when the devil is trying to convince you that your sins are too great to be forgiven and forgotten. You are forgiven. You are loved. Your sin is dead and gone forever, because Jesus has taken care of all things that He may carry you through the strife of this life to His joy immortal. Amen.

QUESTIONS

Why do we remember what people have done to us?

Why doesn't God do this?

How does this free us to live a joyful life filled in faith toward God and fervent love for each other?

Forgiveness & Day 29

SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:9-14; Psalm 31:1-5

DEVOTION

The English doesn't get it. The prayer of the Tax Collector is not, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, a sinner," but rather, "Cover me in your righteousness, O Lord, for I am the only sinner that exists." Now, you could say that this doesn't matter, but it does. These are certain words used for a reason to describe what forgiveness looks like. Forgiveness is not something that is attained by the works of man, but rather is the gift of being covered in the righteousness of Christ.

For the word that St. Luke is carried along by the Holy Spirit to use here in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is also used in Paul's letter to the Church in Rome, in the book of Hebrews, and in St. John's first epistle.. It is translated there as "propitiation," and this means a covering. When the penitent prays this, they are asking that God would cover them in His righteousness. Look at the Pharisee. He didn't desire to be covered, but wanted all of his merits and works to be made known to all within earshot. He wanted to impress man, and merit God's favor by his good attendance record and tithing. He wanted God to know him according to his own works, rather than according to God's mercy alone. May the Holy Spirit keep us from this trap that all of us fall into more times than we desire. We don't want to depend on our works, but we do so more than our New Man likes. May the Holy Spirit work this out of us, that we may be rescued from the sandy foundation of salvation and forgiveness by works.

We have been rescued from this, and are always being rescued from this. God rescues us from this first by coming and showing us that we have nothing impressive to show. We have no works that are not tainted by even more sins. We have nothing to present before God and man. The law comes and tells us that we cannot please God by our merits and works. As the old hymn goes, "our works cannot salvation gain, they

merit only ends pain.” But then we sing, “Forgive us Lord, to Christ we flee, Who pleads for us, endlessly. Have mercy, Lord!” The law comes and says the only option is repentance. The only option is to repent. Repent, because you repent to the only God Who desires to cover you in His righteousness. For that is what the Gospel is. The Gospel is the good news that your salvation is absolute in the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the reality that, rather than presenting yourself before the Father, Jesus presents you robed in righteousness that covers all your sins. Jesus has done this for you. He has taken all those sins that taint you and washed them in His blood. You are cleansed. You are forgiven. You are covered and robed with garments too beautiful for words.

This text is also a wonderful exhortation for private confession and absolution. When you confess your sins on Sunday morning, or in the Lord’s Prayer, you are forgiven. However, the devil comes and tempts you to doubt this forgiveness by saying, “If the pastor really knew what you’ve done, you would never be forgiven.” Private confession and absolution is that great gift that allows you to come and be the only sinner present, so that all doubt is removed that you are the sinner covered in Christ’s righteousness and therefore the saint. You confess your sins, those that weight heavy on your heart, and see yourself literally as the only sinner in the room. You then are forgiven, propitiated over, and robed in Christ’s righteousness that you may leave the church justified in the righteousness of Jesus.

May the Holy Spirit bring you to see yourself as the only sinner in the room. For this also frees you from living a life in constant judgment of those around you. When you see your sin alone then you focus and wait ever more for the voice of the Gospel to ring out for you. It is for you. You are forgiven. No matter how terrible your sins, past, present, or future, you are forgiven. Take heart then, dear saint, for Jesus has you covered you and sends you justified to spend eternity with His Father and your Father. Amen.

QUESTIONS

How does this parable help us understand the depths of forgiveness?

What does this text teach us about how forgiveness works for us?

Forgiveness & Day 30

SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:1-10

DEVOTION

This is forgiveness. We are the lost sheep. We are the lost coin. What is the common theme? We are lost. Remember your Catechism and the second article of the Creed that says that Jesus has redeemed “me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from sin, death, and the power of the devil.” Because of the fall into sin we are lost. We are not conceived and born as free children who love God unconditionally, but rather are conceived in sin with a concupiscent nature that despises everything about God. We are lost. May the Holy Spirit work in us the humility to have a righteous despair in ourselves. Not that we doubt God’s love, but that we acknowledge that we cannot gain God’s favor on our own. May this then bring us to repent and confess that we are lost and must be found.

For we are that one sinner over whom the angels in heaven rejoice because of our repentance. Yes, we were lost, but now we are found by our Lord Jesus. This text teaches us that our forgiveness is by grace alone. We don’t help Jesus save us. Why is this so hard for us to wrap our heads around? Is it because we don’t think much of ourselves? This may be true for some of us. However, it isn’t true of all of us. For others, we can’t wrap our minds around this because we don’t experience this type of crazy love in our life. This type of love never stops until we are found. It doesn’t give up, but keeps seeking us until we are back home safe and sound. Jesus came and slayed bitter death that we may live with Him forever. This is the type of love Christ has for us. This is a love that knows no bounds and never stops until we are safe in His hands. The angels then rejoice when Jesus returns with us on His shoulders to show His Father the spoils of His war with sin, death, world, and the power of the devil.

For Christ has sought us when we were lost. We may never wrap our minds around this love, but that doesn’t stop this love from coming

and rescuing us. Christ went to the depths of our depravity in order that we who are lost in our sins may be rescued and delivered from the condemnation that our sins merit. We are forgiven. Jesus has found us and claimed us as His beloved prize.

That is who you are. You are the most prized possession of Jesus. He values you more than anything else in all creation. This is your life. This is your way. This is what defines you. You are Jesus' prized possession. You belong to Him and He to you. You who were lost have been found and claimed by Christ the crucified.

May this truth give you joy throughout your day. May it define everything that you do in life. May it define the food you eat and the clothes you wear. May it define the people you talk with and the money you hand over. May it determine your daily routine and calm you in the midst of your chaos. May this truth define you as one who is claimed by Christ and destined for paradise. May the Holy Spirit remind you today that you are no longer lost. No. You have been found in the blood, wounds, and death of Jesus and marked as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. You are Christ's and He is your forever. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What does it mean to be lost?

What does it mean to be found?

*Though great our sins, yet greater still
Is God's abundant favor;
His hand of mercy never will
Abandon us, nor waver.*

*Our Shepherd good and true is He,
Who will at last His Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow.*

LSB 607:5