

THIRTY DAYS OF

Forgiveness

— PART ONE —



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

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Zion Lutheran Church

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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.

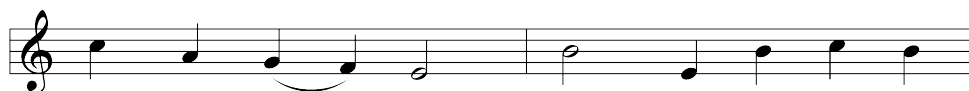
– Jesus' Sheepdog

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 1

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 18:21-35; Psalm 32

DEVOTION

Can you imagine being forgiven 3.48 billion dollars? I can't even imagine having that much money. That is how much the man owed his master. He had 10,000 talents, which today would be almost three and a half billion dollars. This man's debt was something that could never be paid back. Now, this is a parable that Jesus is telling, so one can assume that Jesus is using hyperbole here to show that the man had spent all the money and could never pay his master back. What did he do? Did he rebuke the master for being cruel in demanding payment? No, for this would be the same as telling God that He is unjust for demanding us be righteous according to His law, considering we are His creation and are commanded to be perfect as He Himself is perfect. Should the man blame other people and come up with some stories to justify why he doesn't have the money on him? Well, this would be the same as blaming everyone else in our lives for our problems. The only option the man had was to beg the master to be merciful. And he could do this because the master was the one that lent him the money, and as we learn later in the text, the master is known for his mercy. The man therefore repented and begged for forgiveness and the master gave it. He didn't throw his family in prison, but freed him from a debt that he could never pay back. Does this not happen for us? Remember Jesus told this parable because Peter was asking if there is a limit to how many times a person should be forgiven. What does Jesus say? No, you silly goose. There is no limit. Even if you sin for a lifetime and incur a debt that cannot be repaid, in the death of Jesus it is forgiven. It is forgiven. You are forgiven. You are pardoned. You are set free from the enslavement that you have merited with your failures and mistakes. God the Father has forgiven you according to the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

How then do we respond to this gift of freedom? Does our heart rejoice in this grace alone and abide in absolute forgiveness with all who

have sinned against us? Think back to Peter's question. Do we not set limits for how much we can put up with when it comes to our family, friends, fellow church members, and anyone else in our life? Just like the man, we have been forgiven a debt that we could never pay back. However, just like the man we have also been sinned against and are given the opportunity to have mercy as God has mercy on us. Remember the man was walking away from being forgiven almost three and a half billion dollars, and then he found a man who owed him 5,800 bucks. Yes, this is still a lot, but it also goes into the larger debt over 500,000 times. We have been sinned against, but rather than pay back evil for evil we hear the voice of the master who says, "And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" Mercy begets mercy. Forgiveness gives birth to further absolution for all in our life. Think about it. How do you feel when you hold onto something? Imagine trying to hold a 500 pound sack of sand. Could you do it? Maybe for a second, but then the weight would drag you down with it. This is the same with withholding forgiveness from your neighbor. You will be crushed by the weight of your vindictiveness.

May the Holy Spirit keep us from this and grant us hearts that are free in the forgiveness of our sins, and free us from any animosity we may have with those who have sinned against us. As the Psalms sing, "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" (Psalm 32:1-2). You are forgiven. You are covered in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord holds nothing against you. Therefore there is no deceit in your heart, but rather love that abounds in forgiveness for your neighbor 7 times 70 times. May the Holy Spirit remind you of this forgiveness today, that you may be freed to rejoice in the mercy of God which abounds for you in Christ Jesus your Lord. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What has God forgiven in you? Be specific.

How have you been sinned against and whom are you gifted to forgive?

How does the forgiveness won on the cross for you free you to be joyful, even when sinned against 70 times 7 times?

Forgiveness & Day 2

SCRIPTURE

Mark 11:20-33; Psalm 60

DEVOTION

God the Father isn't asking you to move a mountain, just to forgive your neighbor from your heart. However, Jesus gives the assurance that when one has faith, one can say to a mountain, "Be moved," and it will happen. However, if you have doubt in your heart then it will not be so. Why then do you not see Christians walking around moving mountains into the heart of the sea? Is it because God has no need for such miracles anymore because we have the written Word? Well, no, because there is more unbelief today than there was when Jesus spoke these words. Are we so arrogant to think that our generation is holier and more believing than those men and women of old who gave up their lives for the sake of Christ? Of course not! We are surrounded by so great a cloud of skeptics that it is a miracle that even one church exists today. So, let us not believe that mountains are not being moved because Christ has no need any longer for such miracles to support the Word that comes out of His mouth. Rather, let us confess that mountains are not being moved because of our doubt. Yes, our hearts are so full of doubts, anxieties, and skeptic moments that it is a miracle we even believe for a second in the love of God, or even His very existence. May we never stop confessing our doubts, lest we like the fig tree wither down to nothing but our own sinful arrogance and prideful justifications for our lack of belief.

Yes, our hearts are filled with doubts and the worries of this life. Is this not why we struggle with forgiving our neighbor and letting go of our grudges? If our hearts were filled with nothing but faith and love, then it would be the easiest thing in the world to forgive our neighbor any wrong they commit against us. What happens with us instead? Instead, we take the forgiveness God bestows on us as if it is a sack filled with joy and goodness, and then we find the first person who has slighted us and whack them over the head with it. Now we don't do this exactly, but we definitely have troubles with letting things go, from the greatest of sins to the least

of mistakes. Why is this? It isn't because the sins committed against us are far too great to forgive, for we have been told by Christ that when we have faith we can move mountains. No, the issue isn't the sins against us, but the reality that we don't believe that we are forgiven ourselves by our Lord Jesus.

This is the issue. We do not believe, with all our heart, that we are forgiven. What do we do then? Do we just accept that we will never fully believe and admit that we are sinners and go on living life as usual? No, rather we repent to our merciful Lord Jesus Who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. We confess our shallow faithfulness and pray, "I believe Lord, help my unbelief." We pray that the Holy Spirit increase in us faith that clings to Jesus' cross alone and rests in Him unceasing. We despair of ourselves and rely on Christ Jesus alone and His desire to rescue us and save us from sin, death, world, and the power of the devil.

Are you forgiven by Jesus? Yes. For how many sins? All of them. There is not one sin that Jesus did not die for on the cross for you. All your sins are paid in full in the blood, wounds, and death of Jesus. Your name is written in the book of life, sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ. You are forgiven. The devil doesn't want you to believe this, the world wants you to forget it, and the Old Adam doesn't want you to hear it. May they all be silenced that you may hear the voice of Jesus alone Who bespeaks you righteous, bright with His own holiness. You are forgiven. You are loved. Your faith is restored this day in the reading of Scripture and meditation on it. Your faith is nourished in the forgiveness which is yours anew this day because your Lord Jesus' mercies are new every morning. May your heart be saturated with forgiven joy today, that you may joyfully sing the songs of absolution for you and for all around you as you are carried through this valley of sorrow to Jesus Himself in heaven. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What does Jesus gift you to do when you forget you are forgiven?

Why do you need to know you are forgiven first before you can even think of forgiving someone else?

Forgiveness & Day 3

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 50:1-21; Psalm 79

DEVOTION

Joseph was born in Israel's old age. He was his favorite son and even had a beautiful coat that none of his brothers had. Joseph wasn't arrogant about this, but told a couple of dreams and ignited the anger which brewed from his brother's jealous hearts. What did his brothers do to him? They wanted to kill him, but instead sold him into slavery, and then convinced his father that he was destroyed by some wild beast. They abandoned him without a care as to his future and well-being. How did things go for Joseph from there? Well, he was accused of trying to sleep with a man's wife, and then was put in prison for it. There he rose to some authority and became an interpreter of dreams. He eventually rose up to being the second most powerful man in the Egyptian empire. Was this what drove him to forgive his brothers? Did he have the gift of absolution because he had worldly gains, and what they did to him allowed him to rise in power? No, rather remember what Joseph said, "What you meant for evil, God meant for good." Through the wickedness of his brothers, Joseph was the vessel through which God took care of His chosen people so that eventually from them would come the Christ Who would guide all of fallen man to the Promised Land of the new creation.

May we learn from Joseph then when we are sinned against as well. However, more importantly let us learn that Joseph was a type of Christ, showing us what the true Christ would suffer for us and for our salvation. For Jesus was betrayed and handed over into the hands of wicked men in the same fashion as Joseph. Jesus, the dearest Son of the Father, sparked jealousy and anger amongst God's chosen people. What did they do? They sold Him into the hands of wicked men so that He could be killed, for it was more expedient that one man should perish, rather than the entire nation. Jesus was betrayed, and when He saw His disciples again, He did not rebuke them but forgave them and spoke peace into their conscience. May we learn then from Joseph that Jesus is the true Son Who was

betrayed that we may be forgiven and granted peace in the famine of this world's existence.

May we also learn how we are to live with our brothers and sisters in Christ who betray us. For it is one thing when a stranger attacks you, and another when a fellow believer sins against you. It hurts more and cuts to the very heart of you. However, whatever is meant for evil, God works for good. He works for good in that, when sinned against, we forgive with the forgiveness purchased and won for us on the cross of Christ. May we forgive, not because we are better off in life than the one who sins against us, but rather because we know the depth of God's love for us and how He works everything out for our good. May that reality sink in and saturate our entire existence. No matter what comes our way in life, all things will work out for our good as we are carried through this valley of sorrow to Christ Himself in heaven. May we forgive then, even when sinned against to the extent of Joseph who was betrayed by His brothers, in the knowledge that Christ was betrayed for us that we may forgive whenever sinned against. Let us walk then every day in the knowledge that, even when sinned against, it is worked out for good by God. God will work all things out for good. May we take both the good and the bad this way and live in absolute forgiveness with all the brothers and sisters that God places in our life to love. Amen.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever been sinned against in the way Joseph was?

Did you forgive in the same fashion?

How can you forgive in the same fashion?

Forgiveness & Day 4

SCRIPTURE

Jonah 3:1-10; Psalm 108

DEVOTION

The book of Jonah is only four chapters. You can read it in one sit-down within ten minutes. Despite its brevity, it is dense and filled with many nuggets of teachings on following God's will, forgiveness, and joy in your neighbor's salvation.

First Jonah teaches us what it means to follow God. Remember God told Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach repentance so that the people may be saved and God relent from the disaster that He was going to bring upon them. What did Jonah do? He got on a boat and went to Tarshish, the opposite direction of Nineveh. He went away from the Lord and the good of his neighbor. Do we not do this? Our salvation is never in our hands as if we could make the decision to follow Jesus and be a faithful disciple. Rather, we always reject the Lord and despise our neighbor because of our fall into sin. Let us learn from Jonah our true nature as those who go the opposite direction of where the Lord is leading us. May our lofty views of ourselves be brought to nothing, that we may confess our rejecting nature as a consequence of our fall into sin.

May we confess our rejecting nature and never live in the naïve opinion that we desire God above all things in and of ourselves. However, let us continue reading the text which shows us that God did not let Jonah continue running, but sent the great storm and the mighty whale to come and swallow him up. What did Jonah then do? He repented and asked God to forgive him. Then the whale vomited him out and God sent Jonah on to Nineveh. When he was only halfway through the city, Jonah preached the unadulterated message of God which called every man, woman, and child to repent of their wicked ways. Jonah preached for one day and the entire city repented – from the king down to the littlest one. This is the true miracle of the book. Yes, a whale swallowing up Jonah and throwing him out is amazing. However, greater than this is the mercy of God working

out repentance in every heart in Nineveh in order that forgiveness could abound. This is the miracle. The miracle of forgiveness is brought about in the preaching of the entire Word of God. The example of Nineveh offers us great comfort in the reality of our own forgiveness. If God can relent from His disaster and forgive even the chief city of debauchery, will He not also relent and forgive us our many sins?

Yes, the miracle of absolution assures us that we ourselves are forgiven. Let us rejoice in being forgiven ourselves and in the forgiveness of our neighbor. Let us learn from the fourth chapter how not to react to our neighbor's forgiveness. Remember how Jonah was mad at God because He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love? Jonah was angry with God because He relented of His disaster and forgave Nineveh. May we learn from Jonah to rejoice in the pardoning of every sinner, because we ourselves are forgiven. We are all forgiven with the same blood that Jesus spilt on the cursed tree of the cross for us. Jesus did not die for some of us, but for every sinner in order that all may be robed in His righteousness that covers all our sins. There is not one sin that Jesus did not die for on the cross for you. There is not one sinner not forgiven by the all-atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. May we learn from Jonah and therefore be freed in the forgiveness of our own sins, and the pardoning that our neighbor hears from the mouth of the pastor and from our mouths as well.

Make it a practice to read Jonah a few times a year. It doesn't take long, and reading it in one sit-down is a true blessing and exercise in the freedom of forgiveness that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. May we rejoice in our forgiveness and our neighbor's as well, that we may continue to receive the many benefits of the life, sufferings, and death of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What does Jonah personally teach us about our sinful condition?

What does Jonah personally teach us about being forgiven?

What does Jonah teach us about forgiving?

Forgiveness & Day 5

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:1-10; Psalm 130

DEVOTION

Yesterday we read Jonah and were reminded by the Holy Spirit of our rejecting nature. We do not accept Christ or make a decision to follow God, but instead, because of our sinful condition, we reject God and His ways. Today St. Paul, carried along by the Holy Spirit, ups the ante and writes that we are dead in our sins. It isn't that we are crippled and can walk a little, but rather we are dead in our trespasses. We can do nothing to move toward God or accept His Word as truth. Rather, we are dead and must be brought back to life in the life-giving words of the cross of Christ.

Paul also gives us a beautiful word in our text today: grace. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. We do not merit or earn His favor and love, but rather it is given to us freely. Remember St. Paul's word to the saints in Rome which say, "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (Romans 3:22b-25). We are justified, or forgiven our sins and brought to life in Christ, by grace alone. Our salvation is not dependent on our meritorious works, but rather on the meritorious work that Jesus finished for us on the cross. We are saved by grace alone; therefore, all our boasting is in Christ alone for our forgiveness, life, and salvation.

We are saved by grace alone. Remember your hymnody that sings, "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?" (LSB 566.5). Grace is our help and strength in every time of trouble. What is the biggest time of trouble for we who are of the household of faith? Well, there are two great times of trouble. The first is when we doubt our own

forgiveness. This happens when we continue to abide in despair because of a transgression once committed, or continue to abide in a habitual sin as if we could never be rescued from it. The second great trouble is when we don't have the strength to forgive our neighbor their sins against us. It is only in the knowledge, meaning the experience of absolution, that we are assured of our own forgiveness and freed to forgive others no matter what they've done to us. We are saved by grace alone and we therefore live by grace alone as we walk in the good works for which we have been fashioned from before the foundation of the world. We don't walk in these works with the hope of gaining God's love, but rather because we are loved by God we walk in these works joyfully knowing that it is good for our own spiritual health and the well-being of our neighbor.

We are saved from sin, death, world, and the power of the devil by grace alone. We know our sinful nature and we cry out from the depths for forgiveness. Though we know our heart's condition, we also by faith know our Savior's voice. What does Jesus say to you? He says you are forgiven. He says you are loved. He says you are claimed. He says that He will never leave you nor forsake you. He says that you are His and He is yours forever. Rejoice and be glad then, my fellow redeemed, for you are saved by grace alone, and by this grace you too will eternal life obtain. Amen.

QUESTIONS

How does the reality of grace determine our understanding of forgiveness?

How does grace as revealed to us in the person of Jesus help us trust that we are forgiven?

Forgiveness & Day 6

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 45:4-15; Psalm 71

DEVOTION

A couple of days ago we focused on the reality of forgiveness in the life of Joseph. We focus ourselves on this again today because it is vital to understand and be led by how God works in our lives. It is ever so easy to think we have everything under control and that we know the best way to move forward. Where do our well-laid plans get us? Nowhere except heavier, stressed out, and filled with either pride or despair. Joseph was thrown every which way, but was always led along by God. He confessed to his brothers that what they meant for evil, God has worked for good in order that all may be fed during the famine in the land. What man means for evil, God works for His good and for the good of His people.

Psalm 71 helps us understand this reality. God is our rock of refuge, the strong fortress that saves us. Saves us from what? Our Lord Jesus is the fortress that saves us from everything that comes our way in life. For peace is not found where there is no enmity, but rather is found in Christ alone Who guides us through every bad situation in life with joy in our hearts. God is our refuge when the world comes after us. Now, the whole world may not be out to get us, but our world is filled with days of pressure and nights of anxiety. We struggle through family drama, friendships being strained, and watching our church which should be joyful in the Gospel giving in to the temptations of this fallen world. Yes, we suffer this present life, but we suffer in the knowledge and assurance that God is our fortress that protects us lest all these foes overcome us.

We are protected by God in the image of Joseph. We are not going to be without drama and pressure in our life. We should expect to follow in the footsteps of Joseph and suffer all for the sake of what God knows is good for us and for our neighbor. We suffer joyfully then in this knowledge. We must be reassured every day that God's plan is greater than our plan, and His will greater than our will. What is His will? It is not

the death of the sinner, but that all may live and come to repentance. What is God's will for you? His will for you is that you live with Him forever. His will was enacted in the death of His Son for you and for your salvation. You are forgiven. You are delivered. You are saved from sin, death, world, and the power of the devil. Here is your fortress. Here is your joy in the midst of sorrow. Here is your deliverance from every bad day and sleepless night. Jesus is your fortress that protects you in the forgiveness of your sins, that you may suffer all, even death, in the blessed assurance that God is working out everything for your good.

May the Holy Spirit guide you to walk Joseph's path today. May He guide you through everything that rises up against you for the sake of Christ. May you be nourished and strengthened in the reality that Christ has done all things well for you, that He may defend you and protect you through the strife of this life and unto His joy immortal. Amen.

QUESTIONS

How does the drama of Joseph help you understand the things you suffer in life?

How is Jesus your fortress?

How does the life of Joseph help you understand what it means to have peace?

Forgiveness & Day 7

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 18:21-35; Psalm 130

DEVOTION

Luther wrote his hymn, “From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee,” by experiencing anguish and meditating on Psalm 130. He drew from these words the rich hymn of confession and absolution that confessed his personal depravity, his need for forgiveness, and the assurance of his pardon in the blood, wounds, and death of Jesus. Luther was assured of his forgiveness not because he gained the Father’s favor by his penitent heart, but rather was favored by the Father because Jesus died for him and covered him in His righteousness. This hymn is best summarized in stanza three which sings, “Therefore my hope is in the Lord, and not in mine own merit. It rests upon His faithful Word, to them of contrite spirit. That He is merciful and just, this is my comfort and my trust. His help I wait with patience.” Yes, we are not forgiven based on merit, but rather forgiven based on God’s merciful heart that overflows in abundant love for us. We are saved from sin, death, world, and the power of the devil because Jesus loves us, loves His Father, and desires all things to be as they are intended to be from before the foundation of the world. Jesus worked this out for us not because we gained His favor, but because He is by nature mercy itself.

Jesus is mercy itself. Just like the king said to his servant that He should show mercy in the same manner as he showed mercy, so Jesus shows mercy to us. We owe the great debt of our inherited sin and our actual sins, and yet Jesus pardons us and cancels the debt by His wounds. He blots out our sins as if they never existed. However, they did exist, and Jesus took them and placed them in His wounds that we may be healed. We are healed now – fixed – granted new life in the forgiveness purchased and won for us on the cross. We are healed and now live in absolute love for our neighbor. If we are not loving our neighbor but instead choking the life out of them like the unforgiving servant, then we must return to the Lord in prayer and meditate on the depths of God’s love for us. Remember: from the depths is where we cry to God. We do not cry to Him in our times

of ease, but in our darkest hour. When we struggle with loving our neighbor and letting go of a grudge, it is not that relationship that we must examine, but rather the one we have with our Father in heaven. When this relationship is restored in reconciliation, then we will have a joyful and forgiving existence with everyone God puts in our life.

We are healed then right here and right now in the forgiveness of our sins. We have been pardoned and our sins cancelled by the death of Christ and drowned in His blood. You are forgiven. You are free. You are healed of every person you have hurt and everyone who has hurt you. You are healed and set free from a troubled conscience and a begrudging heart. As Luther ended his hymn, "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." You are free from all sin and sorrow. Take heart then and rejoice in the full forgiveness which is yours today. May this forgiveness drive everything you do and compel you to live joyfully with those who harm you, in the knowledge that everything is more than good between you and the Father; it is perfect in the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

QUESTIONS

How does God's forgiveness free us to forgive others?

Is there someone you need to forgive today?

Is there someone who needs to forgive you today?

Forgiveness & Day 8

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 9:23-28; Psalm 25

DEVOTION

For Your Name's sake oh Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. We do not petition our Father in heaven to forgive us based on our merit. We do not ask His pardon because we sinned less than we did good. We do not ask for forgiveness because we didn't know what we were doing. Rather, because of Jesus, we ask our Father in heaven to pardon and forgive us our guilt which is too much for us to bear. God the Father therefore forgives us based solely on the merits of His Son Who was sacrificed once and for all for us on the cross. Jesus was sacrificed once and for all for us that He may now enter the heavenly dwelling on our behalf and present evidence for our presence in His Father's heavenly court.

Remember from our Hebrews reading that Jesus has now entered not an earthly temple, but the heavenly temple to plead our case before His Father in heaven. He goes on our behalf and shows His Father the marks of His sacrifice on the cross for us. He points to His pierced hand, feet, and side and says, "I have done it. It is finished. I took all the sins, every single one of them, and this is what I paid for it. I paid it all for them. They are sinful no more. They are holy just as I am holy. My righteousness is theirs. My life is theirs. My holiness is theirs. For I have taken their sin, death, and unbelief as My own and drowned it in My blood." Jesus pleads your case before His Father and your Father in heaven. Jesus is in heaven right now advocating for our presence before the Father unto all eternity. He pleaded our case, not based on our good behavior or perfect attendance records, but rather on His abundant mercy shown forth for us when He laid down His life for us on the cross. Our invitation to heaven is written in the blood of Jesus and sealed by His death and glorious resurrection. He will come then on our Last Day and deliver that invitation to us.

For Jesus is going to return not to ridicule us for our sins, but to save we who wait eagerly for Him according to the forgiveness of our sins.

We wait eagerly for Him by receiving the message of the Gospel through the mouth of His sent servant. Jesus sends us our pastors to proclaim the good news that our atonement is accomplished and our deliverance assured just as Jesus is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. We hear this message that we may not fall away, but ever hold fast to the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. We hear this message to remind us that Jesus is in heaven as our advocate and defender, and will come again on the Last Day to raise us up bodily and carry us unto the new heavens and the new earth.

May the Holy Spirit nourish you this day in the reality that your sins are forgiven, and even now Jesus points to His wounds before the Father to show Him that you are pardoned for everything. You are forgiven and therefore welcomed into the presence of God here in the church and unto eternity in heaven. May this compel you today and free you to plead your neighbor's case as well, that they may also be robed in Christ's righteousness that covers all their sins. Jesus has your back; may you have your neighbor's as you wait with them for that great and awesome day when the roll is called up yonder. Amen.

QUESTIONS

How does Jesus pleading your case compel you to plead for your neighbor?

How does Psalm 25 help us understand Jesus' vocation as our advocate?

Forgiveness & Day 7

SCRIPTURE

Luke 11:1-13; Psalm 32

DEVOTION

Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. What do you ask God for in your daily prayers? I'm sure you are like me and you ask for God to watch over your family, your country, and your church. You ask Him to be with those who are sick and bring them healing. You ask God to help you in everything that is troubling you. You ask God to help you with your finances and put the cookie down so you don't waste those five miles you ran before breakfast. You ask God for everything you need to support this body and life. Like me, I am sure you ask God for all those first article gifts, those things that our Heavenly Father gives to us to support this body and life. However, like me as well, I think forgiveness may be a footnote in your prayer life.

When I pray to God, the chief thing for which I pray, or at least I should pray for, is to be forgiven my sins. I can ask God to give me a billion dollars, but if I am not forgiven, that money will be passed onto someone else while I lie in anguish in hell because I valued temporal things more than the purity of my soul. The greatest thing for which we pray is to be forgiven our sins, that our souls may be cleansed and we may eternal life inherit. How do we ask for forgiveness? Do we have to offer God tribute and pray that He is appeased with our gift? Do we come before our Father in heaven and hope that He sees our sorrow and takes pity on us because we have already beaten ourselves up? Or do we ask based on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Lord? Is this not what it means to ask anything in Jesus' Name? When we ask God the Father to forgive us, we trust that He does forgive us; not based on our merit, but rather on the merit of His Son's life, sufferings, death, and resurrection for us. We ask the Father to forgive us, and we base this petition not on our merit but on the merits of the blood, wounds, and death of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Jesus' merit is what compels the Father to forgive you and cancel the debt you owe because of your sins. Yes, our Father in heaven is merciful, but His mercy is not an abstract. His mercy is located in the wounds of His Son. His mercy finds itself in the blood that flowed for us from the brow, hands, feet, back, and side of Jesus Christ. His mercy now flows for us into the chalice, font, and mouth of a fellow sinner that proclaims unconditional pardon. The Father's mercy is located in Jesus, and Jesus is located in the means of grace for you that you may be covered in the mercy of the Father and forgiven all your sins. This mercy nourishes us and strengthens our faith to look to Jesus' cross alone and delight in those things that are eternal. We therefore ask for forgiveness because it is the gift that grants us eternal life and salvation. Without these we are bound to lead an empty life that ends with nothing but eternal punishment. May the Holy Spirit then grant us faith to ask for forgiveness above all else and live by the Bread of Life alone, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What does your daily prayer life look like?

How does Luke 11:1-13 help you understand prayer better?

Why is forgiveness the greatest thing to pray for everyday?

Forgiveness & Day 10

SCRIPTURE

Luke 6:27-38; Psalm 51:1-12

DEVOTION

So is our forgiveness dependent on forgiving others? It seems that way in our first reading today from Luke 6. However, it must be understood that Jesus here is speaking of a life already claimed. He is not adding conditions that must be met before you can be forgiven, but rather describing what the new life looks like for those who have been born from above and regenerated in the forgiveness of their sins. He is describing what the baptismal life looks like; therefore He says to all, “forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

Luther helps us understand this in the Large Catechism concerning the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer saying, “Meanwhile, a necessary but comforting clause is added, ‘as we forgive our debtors.’ God has promised us assurance that everything is forgiven and pardoned, yet on the condition that we also forgive our neighbor. Inasmuch as we sin greatly against God every day and yet he forgives it all through grace, we must always forgive our neighbor who does us harm, violence, and injustice, bears malice toward us, etc. If you do not forgive, do not think that God forgives you. But if you forgive, you have the comfort and assurance that you are forgiven in heaven. Not on account of our forgiving, for God does it altogether freely, out of pure grace, because He has promised it, as the Gospel teaches. But He has set up this condition for our strengthening and assurance as a sign along with the promise which is in agreement with this petition, Luke 6:37, ‘Forgive, and you will be forgiven.’ Therefore Christ repeats it immediately after the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:14 saying, ‘If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you’” (Large Catechism III.93-95).

Forgive and you will be forgiven is a condition added to the promise to assure us that we are forgiven. Only in the freedom that comes in being forgiven by God on account of Jesus is there true freedom to

forgive our neighbor with no strings attached. Because we know we are forgiven and experience the joy of being absolved, we therefore joyfully forgive all who hurt and harm us by what they do. Let us not see this passage then as God putting strings on His forgiveness, but instead the reality of what happens to us when we are forgiven all our sins. When we are forgiven we want nothing more than to forgive and pardon others with the same freeing voice of absolution. When we are forgiven we desire to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful. When we are not forgiving and not being merciful, then there is a problem with our regeneration. When we are holding grudges and hating our neighbor, may the Holy Spirit invite us anew to repent of our sins and rejoice in the full forgiveness of our sins. May we not try to fix our unforgiving heart on our own, but instead die to ourselves in the forgiveness of our sins that it may be Christ Who works through us and in us to trust in His mercy alone and be led along by His grace alone to forgive all who are in our lives.

May forgiveness guide you today. You are forgiven. You are loved. You stand in the Father's presence robed in Christ's righteousness that covers all your sins. All of this is by grace alone. You haven't earned any of it. May you then give that same gift to your neighbor and show them the same grace as you live a life filled with mercy even as your Father in heaven is merciful toward you in Christ Jesus, your Lord. Amen.

QUESTIONS

How does the condition of forgiving assure you of your forgiveness?

How does this assurance free you to joyfully forgive your neighbor?

Forgiveness & Day 11

SCRIPTURE

Micah 7:18-19; Psalm 103

DEVOTION

In the death of Jesus all your sins are cast into the depths of the sea. This is a very graphic image. Imagine being dropped out of a boat at the deepest part of the ocean. You wouldn't make it out alive. Imagine even more that an anchor is wrapped around your ankles. If you are dropped out you will continue to sink, your lungs will stop working, you will be surrounded by a host of lovely sea creatures that see you as a snack, and you will die. You will not survive. When Micah carried along by the Holy Spirit wrote these words, he was making the point of what God does with your sins. In the death of Jesus, your sins are dropped into the depths of the sea, meaning they don't survive. Your sins are no more. They are more than just crippled, they are dead and gone.

In the death of Jesus, your sins are thrown into the depths of the sea. It doesn't say that they accidentally fall into the sea, but that they are cast into the depths of the sea. Remember St. John the Baptist's sermon on Jesus when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world." All your sins were cast on Jesus. All your sins were cast on Jesus in the same manner that they are cast into the depths of the sea. When your sins are cast on Jesus, they die; they are no more. Your sins do not exist anymore in the eyes of the Father. You may try to remember them, but then you hear anew that Jesus has taken them and drowned them in His blood. Your sins have been cast on Jesus, and they can be found no more. Your sins are dead and gone. Your sins are cast into the depths of the sea and a "No Fishing" sign put up so that no one may go searching for those mistakes and iniquities.

Your sins are cast into the depths of Jesus' wounds, separated from you as far as the east is from the west. You can't find them now. The devil will encourage you to dig them back up, and the world will always try to remember your failures. However, Jesus has cast them into the depths of

His wounds, that you may be healed of those sins and the wicked fruits of them. May this word from God through His prophet Micah comfort you when tempted by the devil to despair of God's love for you. It is ever so easy to believe that God doesn't love you when you think and ponder your many sins. When the devil comes and opens the book of your transgressions, it is easy to believe that God could never love someone as sinful as you, or at least someone who continues to fall into the same temptations habitually. The devil would have us believe that God hasn't cast our sins into the depths of the sea. He would have us believe that God holds on to some sins so that we don't fool Him a second, third, or five hundredth time. This is not the case. Our sins are not remembered, but rather cast into the depths of the sea that they may die and be forgotten. You can't get your sins back. The devil can't fish them out. The world can't find them. Your sins are cast into the depths of the sea in the blood, wounds, and death of Jesus.

May this image guide you throughout your day today. Your sins are cast into the depths of the sea. They are dead. They are forgotten. They are gone. Jesus has taken them on Himself and drowned them in His blood when He died for you, in your stead, on the cross. Take heart then, and may no sin burden you as you go throughout your day joyfully serving your neighbor in the vocations gifted to you from above, Amen.

QUESTIONS

How does this image help us understand what Jesus did for us on the cross?

How does this image help us understand how we are to forgive our neighbor?

How does this image help us in the midst of our despair and temptations to doubt God's love for us?

Forgiveness & Day 12

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 21:28-32; Psalm 119:1-16

DEVOTION

Part of repentance is a changing of the heart. When the law comes and reveals our sins to us, we see the error of our ways and by faith desire not to do them anymore. However, this is only part of repentance. To be repentant is more than just not desiring to sin anymore, but also knowing the solution to your sins and the way in which your sins are overcome.

The solution to our sins is the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. We can feel sorry for the things we do and try to make amends for them. However, this is still sinning because we believe we can fix our transgressions and make a change within our sinful hearts. This is the sin of pride and arrogance. Remember that all your sins have been cast on Jesus. He is the One Who takes care of and makes amends for your sins with your Father in heaven. He is the One Who will guide any relationship-mending that needs to be done before God and amongst your neighbors. The solution to your sins is the blood, wounds, and death of Jesus. Like the first brother who said he wouldn't work but then did, so are we who repent and trust in Jesus' mercy to forgive us. We do not trust in our merits to erase our transgressions, but rather believe that Jesus has finished the work of our atonement so that our sins may be cancelled and the debt cleared from our records forever.

The solution for our guilty conscience then is the forgiveness that Jesus purchased and won on the cross for us. Our sins are then overcome in this life, not by working it out ourselves, but by receiving the gifts of Jesus' work on the cross for us. Our sins are overcome when we receive the blessed forgiveness that comes to us in the means of grace. Your sins are overcome by hearing the Gospel and receiving the blessed sacraments. Your sins are overcome when you go to private confession and absolution, confess your sins to the pastor, and receive forgiveness from him as from Christ Himself, not doubting, but truly believing that by it your sins are

forgiven before God in heaven. Your sins are overcome when you gather with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and console each other in the assurance of Jesus' vicarious death on the cross for you and for your salvation. Your sins are overcome and you are set free here and now in the life of the Church in which the Gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel.

May this truth guide you throughout the day. You are forgiven. You are loved. Your sins are overcome in the death and resurrection of your Lord Jesus. Your sins are overcome as you eat Christ's Body and drink His Blood. Your sins are overcome because you are baptized. Your sins are overcome because you have been and will always be absolved. Take heart, you are forgiven. May this Word be a lamp for your feet to guide you unto the path of righteousness that leads to life eternal. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What does repentance look like?

What sins has Jesus overcome in your life?

Forgiveness & Day 13

SCRIPTURE

Luke 5:17-26; Psalm 51

DEVOTION

This passage is so interesting. Remember it says that the man's friends couldn't find a way to get him in to see Jesus, so they lowered in through a hole in the roof. What does it say next? Does it say that Jesus saw the man's faith? No. Rather, it says that Jesus saw *their* faith and then said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

What does this mean? How can Jesus see someone else's faith and then forgive you? How can Jesus see your faith and forgive someone else? The man in the bed had no control over the situation because he was paralyzed. Are we not paralyzed in our sins? Is our neighbor not paralyzed in their transgressions? Who brings us then to Jesus? How do we come to Jesus to be forgiven? Well, remember your Catechism which says, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps her in the one true faith." The Holy Spirit is the One Who brings us and all believers to Jesus to be forgiven with the forgiveness that He purchased and won on the cross for us.

The Holy Spirit does not do this abstractly, but rather works through means. He works through the preaching of the Gospel and the distribution of the sacraments. He works where and when He wishes in those who believe in Him. What does this mean? It means that the Holy Spirit worked through and continues to work through someone of flesh to bring you to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. He works through your pastor who preaches the Gospel, forgives your sins, and distributes the sacraments for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Holy Spirit also works through each and every one of us. He works through mothers and fathers bringing their children to the waters of Holy Baptism. He works

through brothers and sisters in Christ consoling each other in the forgiveness of their sins. He works through friends who invite each other to Bible study and the Divine Service. The Holy Spirit works through people like in our text who desire their friend to be healed by Jesus. The Holy Spirit has worked through others to bring you to Jesus, and has worked through you to bring others to Jesus. He is always doing this, that all may hear from the mouth of Jesus, "Your sins are forgiven you."

May this truth compel you to trust in Christ today. You did not chose Him, but rather He chose you and sent His Holy Spirit to bring you to Himself. He didn't do this one time and now it's up to you to stay in the faith. But rather the Holy Spirit continuously calls you and invites you to rest in the assurance of the full pardon and forgiveness of your sins. May this gladden your heart today, knowing that the Holy Spirit brings you to Christ that you may hear over and over again that you are forgiven, claimed, and loved forever. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What does this text teach you about your place in salvation?

Are you active or passive concerning your salvation?

How does this then define how you live with your neighbor?

Forgiveness & Day 14

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Psalm 13

DEVOTION

For our sake He made Him to be sin Who knew no sin, so that in Him we may become the righteousness of God. What comfort. What assurance. What solace we have in this one verse. Jesus, the Son of God, sinless and unblemished, became sin for us. He became all our sins. He became them all from womb to tomb. There is not one sin that Jesus did not die for on the cross for us. What does this mean then for us? What does it matter that Jesus became all of our sins?

It means that our sins are not ours anymore. Our sins belong to Jesus. He is our sacrificial lamb Who went uncomplaining forth to the cross for us, to die for us, to pay the debt in full that we owe to the Father. Jesus has done it. He has paid the price. The work of our salvation is finished. Our forgiveness and deliverance is purchased and won. This means then that we have reconciliation with the Father. This is more than just a restoration of a relationship, but rather restoration to God the Father's favor. We are no longer enemies of God, but His children. He is no longer angry with us because of our sins. His wrath was emptied in full on His Son on the cross. We are reconciled, at peace with the Father as it is intended to be. We are reconciled, not based on our merit, but based on the merit of Jesus' blood, wounds, and death. No matter how many times we stumble and fall, this reconciliation is assured because it is all in Jesus' hands.

For we do stumble and fall. We walk away from God daily and worship again the gods of this world. However, our reconciliation is out of our hands. Jesus knew what He was getting into when He took all our sins on Himself. He knew every time we would go astray. He knew every time we would let our anger get the best of us. He knew every time we would be overcome by lust. He knew our envious hearts and our deceitful tongues. He knew it all, and still went to the cross to die the death we

deserve. He did all this that we may stand under the Father's favor and abide in His peaceful presence. He did all this so that when we fall, we may be restored in the forgiveness of our sins. He did all this so that His minister of reconciliation may come and announce anew the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus gave it all up so that you may receive everything in the waters of Holy Baptism. Jesus did all of this so that when we fall, we may be picked back up and nourished with His food of immortality in the sacrament of the altar. We are reconciled with the Father no matter how far away we stray or how dark the abyss in which we dive.

You are reconciled, dear brothers and sisters. You are not God's enemy, but His friend. You are His true child. You are a co-heir of the kingdom of heaven. Be at peace then today in the full assurance that you stand in the Father's favor forever. May this free you to live reconciled with everyone in your life, knowing that because God loves you, you are free to love everyone in your life no matter what. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What does reconciliation mean?

What is the price for reconciliation?

How does this help us in reconciling with others in our life?

Forgiveness & Day 15

SCRIPTURE

Mark 6:1-13; Psalm 139:7-10

DEVOTION

Faith alone receives the forgiveness of sins. Faith alone receives this because forgiveness is not based on works, but on the promise of Christ the crucified. Our forgiveness is not a reward for good behavior, but rather a gift in spite of our bad conduct. Faith is required for the forgiveness of sins, meaning we trust that we are forgiven not because we have merited it, but rather because Jesus is merciful and desires nothing more than to pardon us of all our sins.

Faith is required for the forgiveness of sins. Faith is gifted to us by the Holy Spirit by which we grasp and take hold of the promise of the cross for our full pardoning. We are not forgiven because we have made progress in our holy living, but rather are absolved because Jesus desires to rescue us from the pit of despair. Faith is required to be forgiven because faith clings to Jesus' cross alone and rests in Him unceasing.

Without faith there is no forgiveness. For faith does two things. First, faith acknowledges our sinful condition. Faith hears the preaching of the law and experiences contrition in the conscience. Faith does not reject our sinful condition, but admits it and clings to the mercy of God alone. Faith does not get angry with God, but instead despairs of the self and confesses, "I believe Lord, help my unbelief. I desire to be and do better." Faith confesses first our complete and utter despair in saving ourselves. Second, faith confesses that it is in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus alone by which and through Whom we are saved. We are not forgiven because we merit it, but rather because Jesus bought it for us through His blood, wounds, and death. We are forgiven and saved by Christ Jesus alone. Faith clings to this truth; therefore, it is faith alone that can and does receive this bountiful gift of grace.

May we not be like those in our text today who were marveled at by Jesus. He marveled because of their unbelief. They did not cling to Him

alone as their Savior. May we learn from them and in this knowledge have an increase of genuine faith that confesses our depravity and more importantly confesses the mercy of Jesus for our deliverance. May the Holy Spirit work faith within us then, that we may ever decrease, that Jesus may increase for us and for our salvation.

May this truth compel you today to despair of yourself and rejoice more and more in the greatness of Jesus' love for you. You are forgiven. You are loved. You are claimed forever. Take heart, you are in Jesus' hands forever. Amen.

QUESTIONS

What happens when works replace faith?

*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