

GATHERING

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another. (Silence is kept for reflection.)

Faithful God, **have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We pass judgment on one another before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before those of our neighbors. We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves. Make us humble, cast away our transgressions, and turn us again to life in you through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of †Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. **Amen.**

Gathering Song "Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace" ELW 716 (Spoken)

1. Lord of all nations, grant me grace to love all people, ev'ry race;
and in each person may I see my kindred, loved, redeemed by thee.
2. Break down the wall that would divide thy children, Lord, on ev'ry side.
My neighbor's good let me pursue; let Christian love bind warm and true.
3. Forgive me, Lord, where I have erred by loveless act and thoughtless word.
Make me to see the wrong I do will crucify my Lord anew.
4. Give me thy courage, Lord, to speak whenever strong oppress the weak.
Should I myself the victim be, help me forgive, rememb'ring thee.
5. With thine own love may I be filled and by thy Holy Spirit willed,
that all I touch, where're I be, may be divinely touched by thee.

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Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray...**O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

WORD First Reading: Genesis 50:15-21

¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?"¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him,



First Reading: Genesis 50:15-21 (CONTINUED)

and said, "We are here as your slaves." ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm: Psalm 103 [1-7] 8-13 (Read Responsively)

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name.

²**Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits—**

³who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases;

⁴**who redeems your life from the grave and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy;**

⁵who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's.

⁶**O LORD, you provide vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.**

⁷You made known your ways to Moses and your works to the children of Israel.]

⁸**LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love;**

⁹you will not always accuse us, nor will you keep your anger forever.

¹⁰**You have not dealt with us according to our sins, nor repaid us according to our iniquities.**

¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is your steadfast love for those who fear you.

¹²**As far as the east is from the west, so far have you removed our transgressions from us.**

¹³As a father has compassion for his children, so you have compassion for those who fear you, O LORD.

Second Reading: Romans 14:1-12

¹Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions.

²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God."

¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

The holy gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

²¹Peter came and said to [Jesus], "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

Grace and peace, dear siblings in Christ, from Christ, who forgives us— always.

A story is told of two friends who walked through a desert. During the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand, "Today my best friend slapped me in the face."

They kept walking until they found an oasis where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mud and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from nearly drowning, he wrote on a stone, "Today my best friend saved my life."

His friend said, "When I hurt you, you wrote in the sand. Now you write on stone. Why?"

The other friend replied, "When someone hurts us, we should write it down in sand where the winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone, where no wind can ever erase it."

Real forgiveness leaves the sins of others and our hurts in the past. But Jesus understands how difficult true forgiveness can be. Forgiveness doesn't come naturally to us.

Forgiveness can be so difficult. I don't mean warm-hearted forgiveness— overlooking a minor slight when you feel kind, or forgiving someone who is truly sorry about a mistake. Think about really hurtful things— times when someone doesn't take responsibility, let alone apologize— situations that continue to wound your heart every time you remember them; words or deeds that brought you real pain and feel like they'll never go away. Those things are hard to forgive.



Sermon (CONTINUED)

Grace and peace, dear siblings in Christ, from Christ, who forgives us– always.

That's what makes this passage so hard to hear. Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive someone, and offers to forgive seven times, an answer that more than satisfies the law and feels generous. Jesus then comes back with seventy-seven times. That's a lot of forgiving the same person for sinning against you.

Then Jesus tells a parable about forgiveness that makes it even more difficult. The parable turns on the contrast between just how much one person is forgiven and how little that same person is asked to– and refuses to– forgive. In order to truly understand the point Jesus is making in this parable, you need to know about ancient money.

In the time of Jesus, a “talent” was about 130 pounds of silver, and it would take a laborer about 15 years to earn it. That means that the servant owed the king about 150,000 years of labor! In other words, he would never, ever be able to pay this debt back. A denarius was worth about a day's wage, so the second servant owed the first about a hundred days of labor– no small debt. But how could he possibly not overlook that smaller debt when he had just been forgiven an impossibly huge debt? The parable ends with the unforgiving servant facing punishment until he pays. Jesus warns that we, too, must forgive others or face the consequences.

Can we ever forgive the way the king in this parable forgives? I don't think that's what Jesus asks us. I think Christ is calling us to connect our lives with the first servant. Maybe Christ is calling us to live out the unbelievable forgiveness we've experienced.

The failure of the first servant isn't simply that he won't forgive, but that he has just experienced an unexpected, beyond-his-wildest-dreams, life-changing moment of grace and seems untouched by it. His whole life changed, but he didn't even notice. It didn't change him.

God always seeks to change us and every person, to put us right with him. God's favorite things to do are to forgive those who seem unforgivable, to love those who feel unlovable. That frees us from fearing punishment, and also frees us to love, forgive, and care for others. The most important thing is that forgiveness is God's gift to us and to all people. So while God always will encourage us to forgive others, it's even more important to remember that God always will forgive you. As we rest in that mercy and grace, we may find ourselves more able to turn with mercy and grace toward others.

Even when forgiveness doesn't seem possible– because forgiveness can still be hard– we still can take comfort that forgiveness is possible for God. When we are unable to forgive, our inability does not have the last word. God is always able to forgive. Living in that forgiveness and love will bring us joy. Amen

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

L: Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

L: You welcome us when we are weak in faith. Uphold your church throughout the world; make it a place of welcome. Strengthen faith through Bible studies and Sunday schools, confirmation classes and youth ministries. Nurture new ministries of education and growth. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

#1. The heights of the heavens show us the vastness of your steadfast love. Have compassion on your creation. Where human selfishness has brought ruin and destruction, we look to you to heal, renew, and redeem your world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

#2. Make your ways known to the nations. Speak kindness to our bitter grudges. Settle our hearts when we want to settle accounts with violence. Bless our leaders with patience and wisdom. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

#3. Teach us to forgive. Remind us that you do not always accuse us. Still our tongues when we are tempted to pass judgment and argue over opinions. Make our congregations and parish a community of mercy for one another and for all our neighbors. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

#4. We give thanks for each person connected with Northwoods StaR Ministries— so many gifts, so many ideas, everyone nurtured by your love. Help each of us to give thanks for our diversity. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

L: Bring healing and justice wherever harm is dealt. Provide vindication for all who are oppressed. Free victims of human trafficking and forced labor; deliver all who are bound by debt. Feed all who hunger, and guard refugees fleeing famine, poverty, and war. We especially pray for all those on the prayer list — Jennifer, Leo, Mary, Scott, Florence, Betty, Arland, Phil & Janice, Dorothy, Ben M., Evelina, Renee, Kay, _____ and all those we name before you now, out loud or in our hearts. *(pause)* Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.** *(Other prayers added here)*

L: All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THANKSGIVING

Offering (The offering plates will be placed near the sanctuary entrances. Please place your offerings there as you exit the worship service today. Thank you for your faithful support.)

Offering prayer

Let us pray...**Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts: our selves, our time, and our possessions. Use us, and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with your love, through the one who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

SENDING

Announcements

Blessing

Mothering God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" ELW 836

1. Joyful, joyful we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love! Hearts unfold like flow'rs before thee, praising thee, their sun above. Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the gloom of doubt away. Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.

2. All thy works with joy surround thee, earth and heav'n reflect thy rays, stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise. Field and forest, vale and mountain, flow'ry meadow, flashing sea, chanting bird, and flowing fountain call us to rejoice in thee.

3. Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest, wellspring of the joy of living, ocean-depth of happy rest! Thou our Father, Christ our brother, all who live in love are thine; teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine!

Text: Henry van Dyke, 1852-1922 Public Domain

Mission Statements

Northwoods STaR Ministries

"United in Christ, Sharing God's Love"

Zion Brantwood

"We are disciples of Christ: Growing in faith, sharing our faith stories, serving others."

First Prentice

"We are Jesus' disciples: Welcoming every sinner, sharing Jesus' love and teachings, encouraging all to live Christ-centered lives."

First Ogema

"We are called and gathered to share Christ as we minister to all, bringing an unchanging God to a changing world."

First Westboro

"Feeding bodies, minds and spirits through Christ."

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor. **Thanks be to God.**