

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 16th Sunday after Pentecost, September 17, 2023.

Today's gospel lesson is sobering. "And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you – every one of us – if we do not forgive our brother or sister from the heart."

Okay! We hear you, Lord. Your message is clear. Chrystal clear. But, clear or not, it's confusing. Why? Because you promised that you would forgive us "seventy times seven." That's 4,900 acts of forgiveness. Surely I must have a balance in my account.

Good question. Do we have a balance? Have we checked lately? Maybe our account is dry, and we don't even know it. And, if that's the case, we had better be really, really good.

But that's not our nature, is it? A nature incidentally which you, Lord, instilled in us. "If my account is dry, it's at least partially your fault, Lord. You're the one who created us with these options. Surely we must share the blame. So there! Take that, Lord."

Whoa! Best we take a step back. After all, this is the Lord to whom we're talking. And we know from previous engagements that blaming the Lord for anything is not a good idea. Thankfully the Lord can be patient, and is patient, many times over. So let's not be cocky about all of this. Maybe a better response to the Lord is "I'm sorry. I know I can do better. And I'm grateful for yet another chance to show you that indeed I can do better and will do better. Forgive me, Lord."

To which the Lord responds, "Apology accepted. I'm happy to hear of your decision, not only to listen to me, but to abide by my words. I will be following closely just how well you do. Until next time. And, I suspect that there will be a next time. Not to worry, though, I'll be there again and I will listen again, and, yes, I will forgive again."

"Forgive again." Not a new concept. In today's passage from Genesis, God says to Joseph, and Joseph says to his brothers "Do not be afraid." The point is simply that

God's Love is really, really, really deep. Today's Psalm (**Psalm 103:2**) echoes this assurance: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

And, here we are, centuries later, wrestling with the same issue of second and third and fourth chances. We recognize our disobedience, and praise God for His forgiveness. In his letter to the Romans (**Romans 14:12**), Paul also stresses that the Lord doesn't just sit around and watch us wander. No, the Lord "is able to make us stand." God is not sitting back and taking notes. God is engaged and forgiving time and time again. Yes, Jesus, God Incarnate, is the ultimate in reorientation, of getting things right, of nudging us in the right direction.

In the game blindman's bluff, the person, temporarily unsighted, listens carefully for a voice and responds to that voice. "Listening carefully" is a life-skill. It actually leads to seeing, to understanding, to touching. And, in this setting, it leads to being touched by the Creator of the Universe. Here we listen carefully in an attempt to get closer to God. But, unlike the game, God doesn't make things difficult. God, in Christ, actually gives us clues. Indeed, Christ is the **Great Clue**. God Himself touches us. A moment in history. A birth, a life, a death, a new life, an on-going life.

And what is our response to the on-going life? From Genesis: "Have no fear!"

But, we're not done, are we. We have today's Gospel lesson. "I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?" (**Matthew 18:34**) In other words, don't just enjoy the Lord's forgiveness by yourself. Share that forgiveness with others. And, lest you forget, I'll be watching you.

Our final hymn today - Come down, O Love divine – reminds us of our responsibility to share. It contains a wonderful phrase: "and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing."

We are recipients of God's "holy flame." It's tempting sometimes just to receive that flame. But that's not the point of the flame. God's Love is meant to be more than merely received. It is meant to be shared. The verb "to kindle" has a "start" dimension to it. To kindle a flame is to light a fire. As God has stirred up you and me, so we are to stir up others by how we live. We don't hide our faith. We share it. God has lit the fire. In Jesus, God has showed us how to keep that fire going.

Well, we've mentioned the verb "to kindle," "to light a fire." What about the noun "kindle"? And especially "Kindle" with a capital K.

Kindle with a capital K is the name of a hand-held device developed by Amazon. Now, I have no idea whether Amazon holds the rights to Kindle the device. I'm sure that the answer is "yes." But ownership of a device design doesn't matter in our context here. We're talking here about ownership of all of Creation, all of History, all of Everything, including you and me and what we do right here every time we gather.

By our choice, we have said to the Creator that we will help care for the Creation, under the auspices of Jesus. It is as if there was a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board, with the opportunity to state our preference. And we checked the Jesus box, and, in so doing, we checked the whole Enterprise. And, here we are, fulfilling our stated desire.

It's all overwhelming, except for the decision of the Creator to engage us as one of us. "Come down, O Love divine." We can handle that engagement if we so choose. God is available to us in many ways, but there is no way more applicable to our situation than the Lord Jesus. "Let thy glorious light shine ever on my sight, and clothe me round, the while my path illuming."

And not just "my path," but the path of those with whom we share the privilege.

Here's our homework. It's always the same, and always a privilege. "O let it – the love of God in Christ – freely burn."

Amen.

Service of Holy Communion
Pentecost 16 – September 17, 2023

Hymn 440 – Blessed Jesus, at thy word

Blessed Jesus, at thy word we are gathered all to hear thee;
let our hearts and souls be stirred now to seek and love and fear thee;
by thy teachings pure and holy, drawn from earth to love thee solely.

All our knowledge, sense, and sight lie in deepest darkness shrouded,
till thy spirit breaks our night with the beams of truth unclouded;
thou alone to God canst win us: though must work all good within us.

Gracious Lord, thyself impart! Light of Light, from God proceeding,
open thou our ears and heart, help us by thy Spirit's pleading.
Hear the cry thy Church upraises; hear, and bless our prayers and praises.

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Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no
secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy
Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the father. Amen.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Let us pray.

Collect for Pentecost 16

O God, because without you, we are not able to please, you mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Genesis 50:15-21

Psalm 103:1-13

Second Reading – Romans 14:1-12

Hymn 343 – Shepherd of souls

Shepherd of souls, refresh and bless thy chosen pilgrim flock
with manna in the wilderness, with water from the rock.

We would not live by bread alone, but by thy word of grace,
In strength of which we travel on to our abiding place.

Be known to us in breaking bread, and do not then depart;
Savior, abide with us, and spread thy table in our heart.

Lord, sup with us in love divine, thy Body and thy Blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine, be our immortal food.

Gospel – Matthew 18:21-25

Sermon

The Rev. Charles Rowins

Nicene Creed – page 358

*We believe in one God,
the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again In accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father,
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen*

Prayers of the People Form IV – page 388

Let us pray for the Church and for the world.

Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honor one another and serve the common good.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grant that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as he loves us.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

We commend to your mercy all who have died, that your will for them may be fulfilled; and we pray that we may share with all your saints in your eternal kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Confession and Absolution – page 360

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

*Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.*

*We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

The Peace – page 360

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

Announcements and Preparation of the Table

Eucharistic Prayer – page 361

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore we praise, you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

*Holy, holy holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: this is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: this is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Breaking of the Bread

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.
Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

The Gifts of God for the People of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Communion

Post Communion Prayer – BCP pge 365

*Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us
as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ,
And you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.
Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage
to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Hymn 516 – Come down, O Love divine

Come down, O Love divine, seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn, till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
And let thy glorious light shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

And so the yearning strong, with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
For none can guess its grace, till Love create a place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Lessons for 16th Sunday after Pentecost – September 17, 2023

Collect: O God, because, without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Genesis 50:15-21

Realizing 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?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, '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. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So 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 103:1-13

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless his holy Name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.
He forgives all your sins
and heals all your infirmities;
He redeems your life from the grave
and crowns you with mercy and loving-kindness;
He satisfies you with good things,
and your youth is renewed like an eagle's.
The Lord executes righteousness
and judgment for all who are oppressed.

He made his ways known to Moses
and his works to the children of Israel.
The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,
slow to anger and of great kindness.
He will not always accuse us,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.
He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so is his mercy great upon those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our sins from us.
As a father cares for his children,
so does the Lord care for those who fear him.

Second Reading: Romans 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who 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. Some 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. Those 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. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If 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. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Why 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. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

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

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

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

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