

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

September 17, 2023

WORDS OF WELCOME

INTROIT: #207 v.v. 1 - 2 “Just As I Am”

1. Just as I am, without one plea but that your blood was shed for me,
And that you called Inviting me, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!
2. Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt
Fighting and fears within without O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

CALL TO WORSHIP:AΩ* (Inspired by Psalm 103)

L: Bless the Holy One with our whole selves. Let us praise the Maker of our being!

C: Let us remember the mighty deeds and the good works of our God.

L: The Sovereign One endows us with many gifts and equips us to do good work.

C: We shall remember the mighty deeds and the good works of our God.

*L: Holy Love entered the world without condemnation but with grace and forgiveness,
mercy and compassion, redemption and restoration.*

All: Hallelujah! We give thanks for the mighty deeds and the good works of our God!

INVOCATION:AΩ*

L: God who calls, it is you who gathers us together and forms us as a community. It is you who makes us uniquely individual and who designs us for companionship. We welcome your presence here among us so that we may journey together this day in your presence reminded of our interdependence with one another. May we see your glory and be inspired to demonstrate your goodness and care through our lives. Amen.

GATHERING HYMN: #207 v.v. 3 & 4 “Just As I Am”

3. Just as I am, you will receive, will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because your promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!
4. Just as I am, your love unknown has broken every barrier down;
now, to be yours, and yours alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE: AΩ

L: God of grace, we need your strength in our weakness.

All: We confess that we can be judgmental and hyper-critical of our neighbors, family, and friends. We project our own shortcomings on others in order to deflect attention from our mistakes. We withhold and condition forgiveness, mercy, and grace from those who wrong us at the same time we seek it for the wrongs we have done. Even still, we struggle to forgive ourselves. You have shown us the better way. Help us to follow your path—receiving and extending forgiveness in a world in need of an infusion of grace for transformation. In your mercy, O God, hear our prayer, and let us forgive as you forgive. Amen.

*Moment of Silent Confession, Listening to God &
Reflection on God's Forgiveness. Redemption, and Restoration of our Lives*

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S GRACE: AΩ*

L: Beloved, grace has always been part of God's relationship with humanity. God does not want you condemned, held captive by unresolved anger leading to bitterness, nor held captive to shame or guilt which keeps you chained to and defined by your past. Rather, The Creator desires you to be released as both forgiven and forgiver so that you may let go of the chains that bind you to the past. In Christ's forgiveness be set free and rise up to the new life offered to you empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit; life that is whole, free, and flourishing.

HYMN OF RESPONSE: #788 "Doxology"

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise God all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done; Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.**

SCRIPTURE:

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Genesis 50:15-21

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

¹⁵ 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?" ¹⁶ So 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. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ 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. ²¹ So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Psalm 103:1-13 - Thanksgiving for God's Goodness

L: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—

**C: who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

L: The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

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

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

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

L: For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

TIME OF REFLECTION: “Forgiveness – A Healing Balm that Sets Us Free”

Corrie ten Boom, author of “The Hiding Place”. She is also a Christian Holocaust survivor who said this, “Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives, is the perfect preparation for the future only God can see.”

Today our story from Genesis takes place immediately following the burial of Jacob. What we hear is Joseph’s brothers telling him a lie that their dad requested that Joseph forgive them for what they had done to him. In Chapter 37 the scriptures already have told the account of how Joseph had forgiven his brothers for their evil intentions toward him; he embraced them and wept with them, invited the entire family as well as the livestock to live in the land of Goshen; so why are we hearing this lie from the brothers in today’s scriptures. Circumstantial evidence would indicate that they did not trust that Joseph’s forgiveness was truly offered to them, but rather granted for the sake of their father and now that he was gone, they feared that Joseph, in his position of power just might seek revenge on them for the evil they had done.

This raises the question, “Why did the brothers want Joseph to forgive them, was it simply that they didn’t want to suffer the consequences of their actions, or did they truly desire a relationship with the brother they once so

despised that they had plans to murder him but instead chose to sell him into slavery? Maybe it was a little of both? No matter what their reason for seeking forgiveness, it appears that they never really believed and embraced the forgiveness Joseph had already offered to them. How long had they lived in fear that one day their evil actions would come back to get them? Biblical scholar Margaret Odell has these thoughts to share on this passage stating that “*Those who hurt often wound themselves, and the healing balm of forgiveness may need to be applied more than once.*”

(http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1014)

Joseph, in offering forgiveness, forgave from the heart both times that it was offered. His forgiveness was not based on conditions that his father remains alive or that they would be indebted to him for the rest of their lives, but on the concept of desiring a right relationship with his brothers and with God. He understood and acknowledged that what his brothers did to him was evil, but he also understood that the goodness of God was still in control and that God could use their evil intentions for the good of many. By trusting in God’s sovereignty and embracing the forgiveness that he extended to his brothers, the evil intentions of his brothers no longer held control over his life. That forgiveness was already a healing balm for his soul. By embracing the concept of being in right relationship

with God he didn’t use his gift of grace granted to his brothers as a source of power to dominate and manipulate them. As a matter of fact, he understood that the indebtedness owed was not to him, but to God. He illustrates this understanding in his words to his brothers when they proclaimed that they were his slaves by responding, “*Am I in the place of God?*” The same is true for us still today. This raises for me the question that the brothers were so concerned about forgiveness from Joseph did they even come before God seeking forgiveness for what they had done? Do we, when we wrong another seek forgiveness only from those we have wronged, or do we come before God seeking God’s forgiveness as well?

As I near the end of my reflection Concerning both God's and Human forgiveness I want to share with you one more insight. Theologian Karoline Lewis shared this quote from her yoga instructor in her reflections on forgiveness--- "*Forgiveness is letting go of the hope that the past can be changed.*" (<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3322>)

Accepting forgiveness for ourselves and genuinely offering forgiveness to others, is not forgetting or erasing the past, or moving on and just pretending the past didn't happen. Forgiveness genuinely offered to another or genuinely received from another and/or God frees us from anger bitterness, guilt or shame; it frees us from letting the past control us and/or defining who we are and how we act. It becomes a healing balm for our souls, whether we are the ones offering forgiveness or on the receiving end of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not saying what one did is acceptable or even at the bare minimum, tolerable; if that were the case forgiveness would not be needed. Remembering the lessons learned from any situation requiring forgiveness is an important part of being transformed by forgiveness as well as comprehending and appreciating the magnitude of the gift we have been given, not so that we are indebted to the other forever, but so that we can move on with our lives in a positive way and extend that grace to another because we too have been offered grace.

Dear Jesus, you are the one who cried out from the cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." It was you who taught us to pray forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." It is you who taught us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. It is you who taught us to not overcome evil with evil but to overcome evil with good. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to embrace and understand more fully the gift of forgiveness, both in giving and receiving it so that it may become a healing balm for our souls, freeing us from the past and allowing us to move into the future with you with a new perspective and attitude. By truly embracing and allowing the gift of your forgiveness to fill our lives, not only will it bring healing and transformation into our lives through this magnificent gift, but it may also bring healing and transformation into the world, setting us free to let go of the past wrongs and allowing us to move into the future with you, gracious God, with new insights, attitudes, perspective and renewed hope. Without your Holy Spirit we cannot do this on our own. Help us and empower us to be both the receivers and givers of the healing balm of forgiveness.

Praise the Lord, o my soul, all my in most being praise you
for in you is healing and redemption! Amen.

A TIME OF PRAYER – LIFTING UP PRAYER REQUESTS – THE LORD’S PRAYER **SINGING THE FAITH: HYMN REQUEST**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:AΩ*

L: Romans 14:7 tells us, "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves." We are in covenant with God and joined in community with one another. Let us give freely and joyfully of our resources as those who live for the good and well-being of all.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:AΩ*

L: Generous and Merciful God, Creator and Source of all that we have

All: receive our humble offerings as a testimony to your provision and a demonstration of our love. May they be magnified and multiplied and used according to your will for the benefit of our community and all creation.

SUMM-IT UP:

SENDING HYMN: #417 v.v. 1, 3 & 4 "*This Is a Day of New Beginnings*"

BENEDICTION & CHARGE:AΩ*

L: May the love of God assure you, the hope of God guide you,
and the peace of God sustain you as you go forth from this gathering
both receiving and extending God's grace in the world.

POSTLUDE:

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