

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Twelfth Sunday After Trinity, August 18, 2024**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 342, 458:6, 382, 321, 367  
Lessons: Psalm 103, Acts 10:37-43, Matthew 18:21-35  
Sermon Text: Psalm 32:1-2  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The worst thing in the world is sin. The greatest blessing is the forgiveness of sin. The central teaching of the Bible is that those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior are the ones who receive forgiveness of sins. They actually receive justification and are declared “not guilty” before God, not by works, but by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith.

It is true that God declared all men righteous, that God justified all men. But only those who believe actually receive the benefits of that work of God. Today we are reminded, as the catechism teaches us, that the most important gift of God is

**THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS**

- 1. Why we need the forgiveness of sins.**
- 2. What the forgiveness of sins means.**
- 3. Its application in our lives is that we forgive others.**

It should be obvious from each day of our lives that we need the forgiveness of sins. Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer we ask “Forgive us our trespasses”. We must make sure that we know what “trespasses” means. God calls any breaking of his commandments “sin”, that is, missing the mark. He also calls it “transgression”, meaning crossing the forbidden line, and “iniquity”, meaning failing to measure up perfectly. Sin is disobedience to God, whether it is a sin of omission – not doing what God demands, or a sin of commission – doing something God forbids.

We confess in the Apostolic Creed that we believe “*in the forgiveness of sins*”. God forgives sins. How does God forgive sins? We learn from scripture that God forgives sins like a judge in a courtroom who tells a criminal that there is no longer any charge or accusation against him, and declares him innocent, not guilty. The Apostle Paul concluded his sermon in Antioch with these words: “*Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.*” (Acts 13:38-39, NIV84)

To justify means to declare righteous, to declare not guilty. In Romans 4 Paul quotes our sermon text that “*David ... speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.’*” (Romans 4:6-8 NIV) The prophet Jeremiah tells us “*I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*” (Jeremiah 31:34)

Exactly how this is done is summarized in 2 Corinthians 5:19: “*that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.*” The New Testament is one chapter after another of the details of that, retelling it over and over again. All this happens because Jesus served as our substitute and paid for the sins of all mankind in full. Because Jesus paid for our sins, and because the living God loves mankind, he forgives us all our sins.

Without this gift, we are condemned to eternal damnation for an eternity in hell.

We must always realize that we are never without sin in this world. Although God has made us his children and given us faith in Jesus Christ, we still stumble into sin daily and transgress because we are human, and are never without our sinful human nature. This sinful human nature is also called in scripture the old man, the old self, the Old Adam, the sinful flesh, and simply “the flesh”. In addition, we live in the world among unbelievers, people who sin against us and give us cause for all sorts of sins: for impatience, anger, revenge, and all kinds of godless thoughts, words, and behavior. Besides, we have Satan behind us, who attacks us on every side, and fights against everything that God wants and represents.

It is for this very reason – that we sin daily and much – that we ask God every time we pray The Lord’s Prayer to forgive our sins. It is not as though he did not forgive sin without our prayers and even before we pray. He has given us the Gospel, in which is found pure forgiveness before we ever prayed or even thought about it. But we pray with the intent that we may recognize and accept such forgiveness. For the flesh in which we daily live is such that it neither trusts nor believes God, and is always active in evil lusts and activities, so that we sin daily in thought, word and deed, by commission and omission. It is always necessary that we turn to God in repentance and receive consolation from him to comfort us again by assuring us our sins are forgiven.

We admit in our worship services that we sin daily and much, and deserve both earthly and eternal punishment. Note that these words “*we daily sin much*” is a humble confession of sins, not an excuse for sinning. We have been told by false teachers that we shouldn’t point out sins because we “*all sin daily and much*”. It is true that everyone sins, but that fact dare never be used as an excuse for sinning or for tolerating sinning. For the true believer in Christ it is a sincere and humble confession, in the same way that our public confession of our sins to God together with one another and together with the pastor in our worship services is a contrite confession of sins!

The fact that we sin daily should serve to crush our pride and keep us humble. For in case anyone should boast of his own godliness and despise others, God reminds us in Scripture that every Christian is no better than any other person, and that in the presence of God everyone must repent and be glad that they can receive forgiveness through Christ’s work.

And as long as we live here on earth let no one think that he can reach such a position that he will not need such forgiveness. In short, if God does not forgive our sins without ceasing, we are lost.

People can be deceived into thinking that God forgives our sins because we forgive those who sin against us. We do not earn forgiveness by being forgiving. Our being forgiven depends upon the grace of our God. But we can forfeit his forgiveness by being unforgiving. Living among sinful human beings as we do, it is inevitable that at times their sinning will affect us even as we often sin against them. Our Old Adam wants to get even, to hurt others, to nurse a grudge. We can find strength to crucify our sinful flesh only as we dwell upon the forgiving grace of our Father. Because we live among people, we know all too well how often they can irritate, aggravate and hurt us. Still we forgive them, remembering the exhortation: “***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***” (Ephesians 4:32) When we forgive others, that is a fruit of faith, a result of sanctification, the work of the Holy Ghost.

God forgives our sins. In Psalm 130 the penitent sinner calls out: “***Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness.***” (Psalm 130:1–4, NIV84) Isaiah gives us these words: “***Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’***” (Isaiah 1:18, NIV84)

John the Baptist was given the mission “***to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God,***” (Luke 1:77-78, NIV84) After his resurrection, Jesus was talking to two men who were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus: “***Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’***” (Luke 24:45–48, NIV84)

On Pentecost Peter preached “***Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***” (Acts 2:38, NIV84)

Repeatedly Scripture tells us things like: ***“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*** (Acts 10:43, NIV84) and ***“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace”*** (Ephesians 1:7, NIV84) and ***“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*** (Colossians 1:13–14, NIV84)

Surely we can rejoice every time we hear about the forgiveness of our sins which God has so graciously given us.

And how does this affect our lives? Just as God has forgiven us our sins, so, too, we forgive those who sin against us, as in the prayer our Savior taught us: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

We need constantly to be urged to be forgiving to all people. We see the example of Jesus on the cross who ***“said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’”*** (Luke 23:34, NIV84) We need to forgive those who confess Jesus Christ along with us. And especially among those closest to us in the family is this true. The problem is that instead of forgiving and forgetting, we remember, we keep a mental list of wrongs suffered and we nurse grudges. We forget the admonition: ***“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”*** (Ephesians 4:26-27) We need to be reminded of what we are saying when we pray “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The hurts which we have suffered from others may be great. But the hurt which we will suffer if we refuse to forgive is infinitely greater – eternal damnation! The old man needs the club of the law; the new man responds to the open hand, to the warmth of grace, the Gospel.

For just as we daily sin much against God, and yet he forgives everything through grace, so we, too, must always forgive our neighbor who does us injury, violence, and wrong, who shows malice toward us, and treats us badly. If, therefore, you do not forgive, then do not think that God forgives you; but if you forgive, you have this consolation and assurance; that you are forgiven in heaven, not on account of your forgiving others, for God forgives freely and without condition, out of pure grace, because he has so promised, as the Gospel teaches.

God forgives our sins out of grace, for Jesus’ sake. We pray that we may then forgive all who sin against us with the attitude of our Savior as he spoke on the cross: ***“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*** (Luke 23:34) And even if those who sin against us know what they are doing, Father, forgive them. Let us be forgiving, not only in word, but in thought and spirit.

When God forgives sins, it is a gift of grace. When we forgive others, it is a fruit of faith. Who knows but what our forgiving spirit may lead others to ask about Christ to the goal that they, too, may be saved eternally. Jesus spoke of that when he told us ***“let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*** (Matthew 5:16) God should be praised, not us!

. We want all men to join us in the true praise of the God who forgives all sins. Hear words again from our Old Testament lesson, this time in the King James Version: ***“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: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.”*** (Psalms 103:1-4)

Yes, truly ***“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”*** (Psalm 32:1–2, NIV84) Amen.

Adapted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for July 2, 2017.