

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity, October 12, 2008

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HYMNS: 342, 458:6, 382, 321, 306, 367.

LESSONS: Psalm103, Acts 10:37-43, Matthew18:21–35,

TEXT: Luke 11:4 (NIV)

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltretter

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 all who believe receive forgiveness of sins and are justified before God, not by works, but by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith.

Last week I started and ended the sermon with this question: "What's most important in your life? What would you answer if I asked What's the most important thing in your life?" Well, today, I want to examine with you something that has been called the greatest, most important gift of the Holy Ghost.

FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US.

1. "We daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment."
2. We pray Father, do "not look upon our sins or because of them deny our prayers."
3. "So we too will forgive from the heart and gladly do good to those who sin against us"

First, we must make sure that we know that "trespasses" means sins. Matthew uses the word "debts" to mean sins: "***Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.***" (Matthew 6:12) 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 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 thus declares him innocent or not guilty. This is what it means to Justify, to declare righteous. St. Paul says in Romans 4:6-8 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."***" St. Paul is quoting Psalm 32. "***Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him***". (Psalms 32:1-2) The prophet Jeremiah tells us "***I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.***" (Jeremiah 31:34)

We find exactly how this was done 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.

So why does Jesus teach us to pray “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” if God forgives our sins?

We must always realize that we are never without sin in this world. For we still stumble daily and transgress because we are human, and are never without our sinful human nature. This 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 men who sin against us and give us cause for impatience, anger, revenge, and all sorts of godless thoughts, words, and behavior. Besides, we have Satan at our back, who attacks us on every side, and fights against all the previous petitions in this prayer which our Lord has taught us, so that it is not possible to always stand firm against the devil in such a persistent conflict.

It is for this very reason – that we sin daily and much – that we ask God every time we pray this prayer to forgive our sins. It is not as though He did not forgive sin without and even before our prayer. For He has given us the Gospel, in which is found pure forgiveness before we prayed or ever 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 of such a nature that it neither trusts nor believes God, and is always active in evil lusts and devices, so that we sin daily in word and deed, by commission and omission. It is always necessary that we run to God and obtain consolation to comfort the conscience again.

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*”. That is true, but it dare never be used as an excuse for sinning or for tolerating sinning. It is a sincere and humble confession, in the same way as our public confession of our sins to God and the pastor and one another in our worship service is a contrite confession of sins!

The fact that we sin daily should serve God’s purpose of breaking our pride and keeping us humble. For in case any one should boast of his own godliness and despise others, God reminds us through this petition that every Christian is no better than others, and that in the presence of God everyone must repent and be glad that they can attain 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 without ceasing, we are lost.

Does God forgive our sins BECAUSE we forgive those who sin against us? NO! Our sermon text especially emphasizes that: “***Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins 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 at times will sin against them. Our Old Adam wants to get even, to nurse a grudge. We can find strength to crucify our sinful flesh only as we dwell upon the forgiving grace of our Father. As we move 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.

We need constantly to be urged to be forgiving. 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 a grudge. 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 the Fifth Petition. The hurt 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 warmth of grace.

We are praying in this petition that God would not regard our sins and hold up to us what we daily deserve, but would deal graciously with us, and forgive, as He has promised, and thus grant us a joyful and confident conscience to stand before Him in prayer.

For just as we daily sin much against God, and yet He forgives everything through grace, so we, too, must ever forgive our neighbor who does us injury, violence, and wrong, 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, 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 then forgive all who sin against us, we pray, 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.

Jesus drives this home when he teaches us how to pray in Matthew's gospel. Listen to Jesus teaching us how to pray, and how he adds the importance of our forgiving others: "**Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**" (Matthew 6:12-15)

When God forgives 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)

We do not really want to be praised. 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 KJV: "**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, O Lord, Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Amen.