

Forgiveness in our trespasses our Humble Reality
Matthew 6:1–21 by Rev. Erik Stadler 2/16-17 Ash Wednesday

¹“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.²“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.⁵“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.⁷“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread,

¹²and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. ¹⁶“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

This Lenten series we will be focusing on the Lord’s prayer as our theme. I have always told people if you don’t know what to pray, say the Lord’s prayer. It is the only prayer Jesus taught to the disciples, and it is short and concise. When Martin Luther wrote his small catechism, he included the Lord’s prayer and broke it down into petitions for the person praying each part as a way of contemplating this short and powerful prayer.

Of course as we start our Lenten season we start with Ash Wednesday with the fifth petition as we remember why we are gathered this evening and what the meaning of the ashes on our head mean. Those ashes remind us of our fate due to sin, and the struggle we face every day not to sin more, and the sign of the cross reminds us of the only hope we have in the face of our sin in Jesus Christ.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin the garden, sin was brought into the world and death for them and the whole human race. Humanity and the world, once perfect were

cursed and fell into sin and death. The evil we do, the struggles in the world we face such as COVID-19 and this freezing weather are all part of it. God told Adam after the fall,

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen 3:19)

And yet even before this drastic punishment God gave hope just a few verses earlier.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen 3:15)

That of course was the warning to Satan that from a woman a man would be born that would crush Satan’s skull and that man was of course Jesus Christ. That is why the ashes are made in the form of a cross. We are humbling acknowledging our fate of being saved alone through Christ.

Thus the fifth petition of the Lord’s prayer makes sense to contemplate as we begin our Lenten journey. We daily sin and recognize the punishment that we face without God’s grace therefore we take time to give thanks and appreciate the forgiveness Christ won for us.

¹⁵*And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Martin Luther wrote in his explanation:

¹⁶What does this mean? — Answer.

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor deny such petitions on account of them; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them; but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So will we verily, on our part, also heartily forgive and also readily do good to those who sin against us.

Luther wrote in section of his large catechism concerning the battle we face daily in sin.

⁸⁹*For since the flesh in which we daily live is of such a nature that it neither trusts nor believes God, and is ever active in evil lusts and devices, so that we sin daily in word and deed, by commission and omission, by which the conscience is thrown into unrest, so that it is afraid of the wrath and displeasure of God, and thus loses the comfort and*

confidence derived from the Gospel; therefore it is ceaselessly necessary that we run hither and obtain consolation to comfort the conscience again.

So, we daily remember the struggle we face with sin as we pray. And we take time in this Lenten season to humbly remember this daily battle of temptation and sometimes succumbing to it. As we put the ashes on our forehead and pray the Lord's prayer. Without Christ we are nothing, with Him we are saved.

And yet how often do we forget that? This week many of us suffered the misery of being without heat or electricity or even running water for a few days. Many of the comforts we took for granted were gone. Many of us were trapped in our house struggling to stay warm.

Yet as bad as the lack of heat and electricity was, imagine if we were without Christ's forgiveness. Our suffering would not be physical but also emotional and spiritual not for a few days but for all eternity. And yet how often do we take God's grace for granted? Lent is a time to remember and reflect on the forgiveness God gave us through His Son at a price of His life for a world that doesn't deserve it.

But that is not the end of it. This petition isn't about just asking us for forgiveness but taking the time to forgive others when they ask for forgiveness. To show the same mercy Christ gave us and gives us every day to those around us when they ask for it.

To not allow grudges or hate of others take over our lives. It is hard to do sometimes. All of us have been hurt by someone. Yet can you imagine if God held a grudge against us? While there are consequences to our sins, once God forgives us, the eternal ramifications are gone.

Likewise, we are to turn and share our grace with others. This doesn't mean you are a doormat to allow people to take advantage of us. Just as we face repercussions for our sin in the form of earthly punishment like paying a speeding ticket for disobeying the fourth commandment, so does our neighbor or family member face consequences. When your child breaks curfew and stays out late. If he asks for forgiveness, you are called to forgive him, but your child does face the consequences of being grounded and not allowed to go out for a while.

But you still love your child and God loves us. You forgive your child as our heavenly Father forgives us. As we go through this Lenten season may we take time to contemplate the Lord's prayer in our time of reflection. Recognizing where we would be without God's forgiveness as God forgives us our trespasses and where we are with

God forgiving our trespasses. Then how our relationships with our family members, friends, neighbors and coworkers are restored when we extend that forgiveness to others.