

TEACH US TO *Pray*



An Order of Worship for the Home

Palm Sunday
March 28, 2021

This service is written for two speakers. Ideally, family members can speak and declare God's grace to one another following this format. For those who live alone, this worship outline can be followed with a brother or sister in Christ over the phone. You may call on a friend to fill this role, or your elder or pastor can worship with you by phone.

There is an "offering prayer" included in this outline. As we continue our Covid adjustments related to gathering, please continue to worship through giving. You can mail offering envelopes and checks to Calvary or visit www.calvaryslz.org to give online.

Palm Sunday Gospel: John 12:12-19

¹²The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" ¹⁴And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

¹⁵"Fear not, daughter of Zion;
behold, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!"

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. ¹⁷The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹So the

Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

Invocation

Reader 1: Hosanna!

Reader 2: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Reader 1: He is the King of Israel!

Together: Hosanna!

Reader 1: We invite you, Father,

Reader 2: Teach us to pray.

Reader 1: We ask you, Jesus,

Reader 2: Teach us to pray.

Reader 1: We desire your presence, Holy Spirit,

Reader 2: Teach us to pray.

Reader 1: We need you, God...

Reader 2: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Reader 1: Teach us to pray.

Together: Amen.

Reader 1: Hosanna!

Reader 2: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Reader 1: He is the King of Israel!

Together: Hosanna!

Zechariah 9:9-12

⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, your king is coming to you;

righteous and having salvation is he,

humble and mounted on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Psalm 118:19-29

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them

and give thanks to the Lord.
²⁰This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.

¹⁰I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall speak peace to the nations;
his rule shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

²²The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

²³This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

¹¹As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

²⁵Save us, we pray, O Lord!
O Lord, we pray, give us success!

²⁶Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
We bless you from the house of the Lord.

¹²Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

²⁷The Lord is God,
and he has made his light to shine upon us.
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the altar!

¹³For I have bent Judah as my bow;
I have made Ephraim its arrow.
I will stir up your sons, O Zion,
against your sons, O Greece,
and wield you like a warrior's sword.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.

²⁹Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!

Confession & Absolution

Make sure each person present has opportunity to confess to a brother or sister in faith. Repeat both parts as needed to accommodate all who are gathered.

Christian Confessing: My prayers are weak and faltering. My thoughts waver and my words wander. Some days I enter prayer oblivious to my own sin and the holiness of the God I approach. Other days, I struggle to pray on account of the guilt I feel. I fail in the action of prayer. I fail in the attitude of prayer. My struggles in prayer reflect my struggles in all of life. I need forgiveness. I need faith. I need a Savior.

Christian Responding: Know for certain, that your God loves you. He meets your weak prayers with his strength. He meets your faltering prayers with the certainty of his promises. Jesus is your Savior, and he grants you forgiveness. He sends his Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith. He invites you to pray to your Father in confidence. Your heavenly Father gives good gifts to his children. You are his child, and his gifts are yours.

Together: Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: The Fifth Petition (Luther's Small Catechism)

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

What does this mean?

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

Matthew 18:21-35

²¹Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³²Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Message

As We Forgive

You heard our gospel reading already. This story of a servant who had his debt removed but mercilessly held his fellow servant's debt against him sticks with us. It's supposed to. Jesus told stories like this so they would be remembered.

I want us to spend time in this story today. The way Matthew shares it, we can recognize an opening and closing dialogue with Jesus, and three scenes which fall between those bookends.

Peter provides the opening question. This is Peter acting as we might expect. He's brash enough to ask the question which is already on everyone else's mind. How many times should I forgive my brother? Should I do this as many as 7 times?

Now, seven is a lot. But it's also a symbolic number. It's a number symbolizing perfection (Think of the 7 days of creation and God looking over all he had made, then declaring it good). Not only is Peter suggesting he could forgive numerous times, but that this forgiveness has the potential to be perfect. His question sets the stage for a story from Jesus.

Scene 1: We meet a king and his servant. The king is settling debts with those who owe him. This particular servant owes 10 thousand talents, and he doesn't have the

money. The king decides to sell the servant and his family in order to recoup some of his loss. The servant begs for patience, and promises to pay off the debt.

Now, I want you to understand a couple things. First, this is a parable. It's not a story recounting actual events. It's a story Jesus made up because it helps us understand something about our relationship with God. Second, parables often include exaggeration. It can be hard to see because we have to translate parables from another language, from another time, and from another cultural setting. But, there's typically something in the parable which is out of place. This is intentional, and it's meant to call our attention to what is being taught.

The debt here is the exaggerated detail. Ten thousand talents is an impossible debt. Even if this servant was paid well above typical wages, this debt would be crushing. If he was well-paid and worked every day, every year, year-after-year, the servant could expect to pay this debt in roughly 1000 years. Yet, the servant seems oblivious to his predicament. He promises to pay it off. All the king needs is patience, right?

There is no way! Those listening to Jesus' story would recognize immediately that the servant's offer to pay was a wish-dream. The servant is done for. This man is going to be sold, along with his wife and children. That is the expected outcome.

But then, something unexpected happens. The king decides to forgive the debt.

And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. (Matthew 18:27)

Wait – what?!?! For those of us who have heard this story before, we're challenged to slow down and actually absorb what just happened. The unpayable debt was wiped out. It wasn't refinanced. There was no bargaining to pay off a portion. This isn't even a reduced sentence for time served. In fact, this isn't even something for which the servant asked. He asked for time. He thought he could somehow manage this debt with a little hard work.

The king shocks us with his action. Why would the king do such a thing? Compassion. We're told he takes pity on his servant. He sees the servant's situation. He hears the bargaining plea – "Just a little more time, sir, and I'll pay it off!" He looks

at this man who owes him everything, and his heart goes out to him. The king has compassion, and then he takes action. He forgives the entire debt. He writes it off as his own loss.

A gift like that changes a person. Forgiveness – especially such astounding forgiveness – leaves a mark on your life. When a burden like that is lifted, a man will live different... right?

Scene 2: We follow the servant out of the king's hall. We see him among his peers where he seeks out one of his fellow servants. This servant owes him 100 denarii. This debt is maybe one tenth of one percent of what the first servant just had forgiven. By comparison, this is nothing. Yet, the first servant begins to choke the other man. He demands payment. He's violent and ruthless.

As we listen to the story, we know his attitude should be different. We recognize that something is seriously out-of-place here. Maybe the first servant was like this before, but the gift he just received ought to have changed him, right?

The second servant falls before the first. He takes the same posture the first servant took before the king. He asks for patience. It's the same request the first servant made to the king.

This is where things will change, right? Surely the request for patience will jar the first servant's memory. Certainly, he'll realize his actions are unjustified given the gift he's received. He'll show compassion.

Compassion requires humbling oneself. Compassion makes the needs of someone else more important than my own. Compassion moves me to sacrifice something in order to meet the need of another. The first servant has learned compassion through the actions of the compassionate king, hasn't he?

No, he has not. The servant's lack of pity is unnerving. His lack of compassion is startling to us, and to his fellow servants. In shock, they tell the king what they've seen and this sets up the third scene of the story.

Scene 3: This scene resolves the tension. The unmerciful servant gets what he deserves. If he will not be changed by compassion, no compassion will be shown to him. If the servant desires justice instead of mercy, he will be shown unflinching justice. It's a harsh end for that servant, but it's what the servant chose.

That's the end of the story. Jesus makes the point of his story clear with his concluding statement.

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. (Matthew 18:35)

The question from Peter was centered on relationships between fellow servants. Jesus tells a story which makes clear that there is a connection between how we act in those relationships and how we are received in relationship to the King. It's a story about our God, and our standing before him. We barter and bargain. We make pretend offers, as if a little more time will allow us to eliminate our debts. We fail to acknowledge the insurmountable debt we owe to our King.

Yet, our King looks on us with compassion. He hears our offers to chip away at the mountain of debt, and he responds by giving what we never imagined to ask for. He assumes the cost of releasing this debt, and he pays it off.

Doing that cost him something. It cost him dearly. Your heavenly Father wrote off your debts at the cost of his own Son. Jesus was put up as collateral for you, and God the Father lost his Son rather than lose you to sin. Even in today's celebration, we recognize the praises of Palm Sunday are tinged with foreboding. We know the payment of Good Friday is but five days away. The death of Jesus paid off the debt that you and I never could. That's amazing!

And yet, there's something about the whole story I don't get. It goes back to Peter's original question. It's hard for me to relate to his question. Maybe it's a matter of translation from another language, or time, or culture. Peter said this:

"Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" (Matthew 18:21)

Peter asks how often he might have to forgive his *brother*. He didn't ask a generic question about forgiving his neighbor. Then we might have heard a sequel to the Good Samaritan story. Peter asks about his brother. He places the question into a family context, which is a way of talking about fellow believers. He's asking about other disciples. He's asking about forgiving fellow members of God's family.

This tells me that Peter was challenged by the need to forgive other disciples. Could it be that he had to forgive an offense from another follower of Jesus? What kind of messed up community was this? I mean, what did Peter's family of faith look like if they were offending each other and sinning against one another?

I'm thankful the brothers and sisters here at Calvary never offend one another. I'm glad we've become sanctified enough to stop holding grudges. I'm so pleased that we forgive over and over again without ever grumbling or complaining about it.

Or, maybe we do struggle with this. Maybe I shouldn't pretend to be shocked by Peter's question.

I know there are still hurts stemming from the season of loss Calvary suffered before I got here. (And I'm not talking about hurts felt by people no longer here. Those exist, but there are hurts still carried by brothers and sisters at Calvary today.) There is good reason to hurt. We closed a school. We ended a relationship with our Pastor. We saw many families leave as a result of these two things. However, our story is not as simple as "bad things happened to us." We also hurt one another – sometimes unintentionally, other times not.

When we've been hurt, we are owed something. That's called justice. If you've been hurt, you can legitimately demand justice for yourself.

However, within the family of God a certain consistency is expected. If you want justice for the wrongs you've endured from fellow servants, you'll also receive justice for the wrongs you've committed against the King. It's only fair.

Thankfully, there is another way. Your King shows you another way. He takes the lead in another course of action. He chooses compassion over justice. He chooses mercy over judgement.

You can show compassion as you've received compassion. You can show mercy as you've received mercy. Instead of holding onto the hurt, you can forgive as you've been forgiven. In fact, that's what you ask and what you declare each time you pray the Lord's Prayer.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

When you pray those words, you're asking God to forgive you and you're also forgiving others. You're doing what the unmerciful servant refused to do. You're relying on the King's compassion to change you.

Now, what do you do if you realize it's hard to forgive? What if you said it once, but you have a hard time letting go? How do you grow compassion to forgive your brother or sister "from your heart"?

Here are three ways you can start:

- 1) **Be honest.** Be honest about the difficulty as you pray to your Father. Admit that forgiving others is hard and ask for his help. Be honest with other people as well. Find trusted friends who will support you in growing this compassion (as opposed to those friends who would only help you justify a lack of mercy. We all have those friends too.)
- 2) **Meditate on God's compassion.** Spend time in prayer and devotion soaking in the reality of God's mercy shown to you. Allow the enormity of his love for you overwhelm your heart. Then, keep praying "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."
- 3) **Forgive.** Even if you don't feel it, do it. Do what you know is right. Then, do it again. Forgive the brother or sister you need to forgive over-and-over until compassion shows up in your heart. Forgive when you don't feel it, and know that God forgives and supplies compassion even when you cannot.

I guess our setting isn't so different from Peter's community. We hurt one another by words, by actions, by inaction, by assumptions. We have a need to forgive our brothers and sisters for the things which happened today, this week, last year, and sometimes many years ago.

The good news is you can forgive, because you have been forgiven. You can do this because of the rest of the story. This week may end with the payment of Good Friday, but the story doesn't end there. Jesus rose to new life. His life makes you new. The resurrection of Jesus proves that God forgives you and forgives through you.

You can show compassion for the small offenses of your fellow servants, because your King has had compassion on you.

Amen.

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Share prayer requests with one another. Pray over the requests shared, then pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be 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 forever and ever. Amen.

Offering Prayer

If you have an offering present as you worship, you may place your hands over it during the offering prayer.

Reader 1: With thankful hearts we receive from you, O Lord.

Reader 2: With thankful hearts we respond.

Reader 1: Receive our thanks and praise.

Reader 2: Receive our offerings.

Together: Receive us as your own. Amen.

Blessing (*Philippians 4:4-7*)

Reader 1: The Lord is at hand;
Reader 2: do not be anxious about anything,
Reader 1: but in everything by prayer and supplication
Reader 2: with thanksgiving let our requests be made known to God.
Reader 1: And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
Reader 2: will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.
Together: Amen.

Palm Sunday Sending

Reader 1: Hosanna!
Reader 2: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Reader 1: We know the cries will soon change to "Crucify Him!"
Reader 2: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Reader 1: We also anticipate the cries of "Risen indeed!"
Reader 2: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Reader 1: He is the King of Israel!
Reader 2: Hosanna!
Together: Hosanna in the highest! Amen!

As applicable, please share this resource with others who would benefit. An electronic version is available at www.calvaryslz.org. We can also add friends to our mailing list if that is preferred.

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