

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

P. O. Box 267, 201 Veterans Dr., Columbus, TX 78934

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E-mail: admin@splctx.org www.splctx.com **Pastor:** pastor.akethan@gmail.com

September 17, 2023 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Sixteenth Sunday of Pentecost

Senior Pastor	Alan Kethan	<u>Home:</u> (979)-942-9060	<u>Cell:</u> (830)-708-1200
Youth & Family Specialist			Stephanie Polasek
Congregational Chair			Donna Maas
St. Paul Christian Learning Academy Director			Briana Bedford
Secretary			Elena Holub
Custodian			Tomasa Rosales
Parish Nurse Program Coordinator			DyAnn Lauzon

MISSION STATEMENT: Love God, Love Neighbor (*Luke 10:27*)

VISION STATEMENT: We will work to strengthen and grow closer in relationship to God and to one another.

- *As we enter into a sacred time and space, a friendly reminder to please set your cell phone to vibrate.*
- ***We want to welcome all of our guests today and thank you for worshipping with us. If you have any questions or would like more information regarding our services, programs, day care, or preschool programs at St. Paul, please visit our Welcome Center in the narthex immediately following our service, and an attendant will be more than happy to assist you. If this is your first time at St. Paul, we hope you will take a gift along with you. We also have a gift bag for children.***
- Hearing Assist devices are available for those who need assistance in hearing worship service better. Please see a person in the Sound Room (Usher Room) to request the use of a device during worship.

* This symbol indicates that the congregation is invited to stand physically or in spirit.

INTRODUCTION

In today's second reading Paul questions why we judge one another, since we all stand before the judgment of God. Yet we do sin against one another, and Jesus' challenge that we forgive seventy-seven times reveals God's boundless mercy. When we hear the words of forgiveness in worship and sign ourselves with the cross, we are renewed in baptism to be signs of reconciliation in the world.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SIGNING OF ATTENDANCE PADS

(Ushers will be handing out Attendance Pads during the announcements. Please be sure to sign your name and contact information.)

SCRIPTURE READING: Genesis 50:15-21

P Our scripture reading is from Genesis, chapter 50, verses 15-21.

After Jacob's death the brothers of Joseph begged for forgiveness for the crime they had done against him. You intended to do me harm, Joseph said, but God used this as an opportunity to do good and save many lives.

The reading begins:

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

* **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

P God, we come before you today realizing the power of forgiveness and the forgiveness given to us through the act of your son Jesus Christ. We confess that we have held grudges, as well as not forgiven as we have been forgiven. Correct our ways and empower us to forgive and be kind. Where we have failed, forgive us and lead us to times of peace and new life.

(Silence for private confession.)

P "Comfort my people," says our God. "Comfort them! Tell them they have suffered long enough and their sins are now forgiven. Come to me and you will live." (Isaiah 40:1-2; Amos 5:12)

C Amen.

GOSPEL SONG: 10,000 REASONS (BLESS THE LORD)

CHORUS:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul, worship Your holy name. Sing like never before, O my soul, I worship Your holy name.

**The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning. It's time to sing
Your song again! Whatever may pass, and whatever lies before me,
Let me be singing when the evening come.**

CHORUS:

**Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul, worship Your holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul, I worship Your holy name.**

**You're rich in love and You're slow to anger. Your name is great,
And Your heart is kind. For all Your goodness, I will keep on singing.
Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find. CHORUS**

**And on that day when my strength is failing, the end draws near and
My time has come; Still my soul sings Your praise unending,
Ten thousand years and then forevermore.**

CHORUS TWICE:

**Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul, worship Your holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul, I worship Your holy name.**

**Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul, worship Your holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul, I worship Your holy name.**

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GOSPEL: Matthew 18:21-35

When Peter asks about the limits of forgiveness, Jesus responds with a parable that suggests human forgiveness should mirror the unlimited mercy of God.

A The holy gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 18, verses 21-35.

²¹Peter came and said to [Jesus], "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow

slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

CHILDREN'S SERMON

SERMON

*** SERMON SONG: RECKLESS LOVE**
Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me.
You have been so, so good to me.
Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me.
You have been so, so kind to me.

CHORUS:

Oh, the overwhelming, never ending, reckless love of God!
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine.
I couldn't earn it; I don't deserve it, still You give yourself away.
Oh, the overwhelming, never ending, reckless love of God!

When I was Your foe, still Your love fought for me.
You have been so, so good to me.
When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me.
You have been so, so kind to me. CHORUS

BRIDGE: x2

There's no shadow You won't light up,
Mountain You won't climb up, comin' after me.
There's no wall you won't kick down,
Lie You won't tear down, coming after me.

CHORUS

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*** APOSTLES' CREED**

A With the whole church, let us confess our faith.
C **I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's 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 to the dead. On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

(The congregation may be seated during the prayers.)

PRAYERS

A Remembering the caring and generous works of God, we pray for the church, creation, and the needs of our neighbors.

A brief silence.

A We pray for this congregation. Open our hearts to practice intentional invitation. Help us to forgive each other, practice patience, and choose welcome over judgment. Move us to care for those in our community seeking refuge and safety.

A brief silence.

A We pray for farmers and ranchers as they continue to work hard to bring us food in this time of drought. Bless them as they sow crops and care for livestock. Send us rain to heal the earth and water to quench Your thirsty land. Let faith be born from our doubts, hope from our despair, and compassion from our troubles.

A brief silence.

A We pray for peace in all the world, especially in Morocco and the devastation from the earthquake as well as war-torn areas of Ukraine, Sudan and Niger. Bring an end to wars and the destruction of lives and your creation.

A brief silence.

A We pray for all those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:
Vernon Schindler; L. E. Kansteiner; Carl Geisler; Virginia Fritsch; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you.

A brief silence.

A We pray for those battling cancer, all expectant mothers, those who reside in care facilities and the homebound, all law enforcement officers, fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers, 9-1-1 dispatchers, and active duty military personnel.

{See all those we pray for on pages 9 & 10.}

A brief silence.

A We pray for the church throughout the world. May we all proclaim the good news of your love effectively. We ask, especially, that you would bless the ministry of our sister congregations Cristo Rey and their Pastor Armando Capcha and Iglesia Cristiana Camino de Santidad and their leaders Pastors Gumer and Naomi Anton in Peru, all Missionaries, especially St. Paul's supported missionary, Dina Anton de Espinoza, and our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic.

A brief silence.

A Remember us according to your steadfast love as we offer these and the prayers of our heart, trusting in your compassion made known through Jesus Christ.

C Amen.

*** PEACE**

P As Jesus shared peace, let us also share His peace with one another. *(Share the "Peace of the Lord" with your neighbors.)*

(We will be collecting offerings before and after worship each week. This includes Power of One dollars.)

OFFERING and POWER OF ONE

"Power of One" is a ministry sponsored by your Stewardship Team. We are asking each and every one of our members to give \$1.00 above what your normal giving would be. We are asking each member to place this \$1.00 bill or change in the offering plate each week. The team is also inviting all children to participate to develop the habit of giving as part of their worship experience. Parents, a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, or dollar bill, any of these will do to help your children develop a habit of giving. These "Power of One" dollars will be used to support local ministries and ministries abroad. The purpose of this ministry is to demonstrate that something as small as one dollar can be used to make a difference in the lives of others.

*** OFFERING PRAYER**

P God of power, God of plenty, all things belong to you. We bring your gifts to the table, that all might be fed. Form us into the body of your Beloved, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

C Amen.

*** REMEMBERING JESUS' WORDS, PROMISES, AND COMMANDS**

*** LORD'S PRAYER**

P Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

**C 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.

* **INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

P Jesus invites you to this table. Come and experience the power of forgiveness.

C **Amen.**

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION (Continuous with Individual Cups)

{Distribution will be continuous. All are welcome for communion. Please come down the center aisle starting from the front. Follow directions of the ushers, coming up one side at a time. Pastor will hand you the bread. If you wish to have a gluten-free wafer, please tell Pastor "Gluten-free, please." Afterward, you will choose either wine or white grape juice from the individual cups in the tray – white grape juice in the center with wine surrounding. Place the empty cups in the baskets located off to the side. Although communion is continuous, you are welcome to kneel at the rail in prayer after receiving communion. Please return to your seat by the side aisles.}

* **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

P Blessed be your name, O God, for we have feasted on your Word, Christ Jesus, the joy and delight of our hearts. Strengthened by this food, send us to gather the world to your banquet, where none are left out and all are satisfied. In Jesus' name we pray.

C **Amen.**

* **BLESSING**

P The God of glory, ☩ Jesus Christ, name above all names, and the Spirit who lives in you, bless you now and forever.

C **Amen.**

* **CLOSING SONG: LESS LIKE ME**

**Oh, I have days I lose the fight; Try my best but just don't get it right.
Where I talk a talk that I don't walk, and miss the moments right before my eyes.**

PRE-CHORUS:

***Somebody with a hurt that I could have helped,
Somebody with a hand that I could have held.
When I just can't see past myself, Lord, help me be. . .***

CHORUS:

***A little more like mercy, a little more like grace.
A little more like kindness, goodness, love and faith.
A little more like patience, a little more like peace.
A little more like Jesus, a little less like me. (2nd TIME TO BRIDGE)***

**Yeah, there's no denying I have changed. I've been saved from who I used to be.
But even at my best, I must confess, I still need help to see the way You see.**

REPEAT PRE-CHORUS and CHORUS

BRIDGE:

**Oh, to feed the beggar on the street, love to be Your hands and feet;
Freely give what I receive, Lord, help me be!
I want to put You first above all else. Love my neighbor as myself;
In the moments no one sees, Lord, help me be. . . One, two, three!**

LAST CHORUS:

**A little more like mercy, a little more like grace.
A little more like kindness, goodness, love and faith.
A little more like patience, a little more like peace.
A little more like Jesus, Oh, a little less like me.
A little more I'm living everything I preach.
A little more like Jesus, a little less like me.
Oh, a little less like me.**

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* **DISMISSAL**

P Go in peace, forgiven to forgive.

C Thanks be to God, and we will.

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USHERS: Bethany Guthmann; Sandy Cherniss; Fay & Thomas Ulbricht

LAY READER: Wendy Page

ACOLYTE: Easton Leopold

STREAMING: Chase Brasher

POWER POINT: Peggy Geisler

SOUND: Sydney Eaton and Todd Jacobs

ALTAR GUILD: Ilene Schindler

WELCOME: In the words of the Israelites: "The Lord is ... the reason for [our] song, because he has saved [us]" (Exodus 15:2, CEV). Welcome to worship!

ALTAR WALL FLOWERS are placed by Kenny & JoAnn Venghaus and Larry & Tootsie Venghaus in loving memory of Kenny and Larry's mother Lucille Venghaus for the anniversary of her birthday on September 14.

Thank You! A special "thank you" to Faith Pore for helping to lead our Praise Band this morning! ☺

COLLECTION OF OFFERING: Offering for the worship services is collected before and after worship. Offering bowls are placed in the back entrance and inside the side sanctuary door for you to place your offering in. This includes "Power of One" dollars.

Amount needed for average weekly budgeted expenses: \$8,405.00

Attendance: Sept. 2 & 3, 2023 – 184
Power of One: Sept. 2 & 3, 2023 – \$51.00

Contributions: Sept. 2 & 3 – \$10,237.01
Building Fund: Sept. 2 & 3 – \$715.02

Attendance: Sept. 9 & 10, 2023 – 208
Power of One: Sept. 9 & 10, 2023 – \$49.00

Contributions: Sept. 9 & 10 – \$8,850.86
Building Fund: Sept. 9 & 10 – \$1,291.44

Thank you to those who contributed to last week's offerings. Loving God/Loving Neighbor.

Wednesday Night Attendance: – Wed., Sept. 6 – **80 Total**
BLAST/Confirmation: 60 **Support Staff:** 20

ATTENTION: *Names on the prayer list in the bulletin will be printed for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, the names will be removed from the bulletin unless the church office has been notified to keep them.*

KEEP IN OUR PRAYERS: Those Battling Cancer: Tom Russell, Jr.; Melda Coleman; Al Gene Canik; Larry Bookout; Mike Wostarek; Elizabeth Frisby; Virginia Fritsch; Kristina Acevedo; George Krenek; Anne Dimas; Carl Geisler; Laura Walla; Dorothy Wicke; Randy Wendt; Heather Deviney; Michelle Thraen; Lydia Rojas; Paul Casinger; Dr. Tom Hancher; Leonard Kahlden; Bob Loy.

Expectant Mothers: Cassidy Zajicek Parks; Courtney Busselman; Nancy Gorman; Camille Stancik; Kyndall Beettner; Jamee Albert.

Those in Care Facilities and Homebound: Joey Denby; Edwin Oevermann; Paul Minar, Sr.; Adrian Fritsch; Coy Dell Schindler; Madeline Menke; Doris Horndt; Helen Perrard; Jane Booker; Pat Brasher. **Homebound:** Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Ronnie Rogers; Joyce Dehmer; Donna Dehmer; Cherie Moore; Lauren Lamb.

Those Law Enforcement Officers: Charles Jobb; Joseph Smith; Todd Jacobs; Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Nancy Gorman; Donnie Templeton; Jason Templeton; Johnny Kovar; Abigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Zane Weido; Josh Jones. **Fire Fighters, First Responders, Healthcare Workers and 9-1-1 Dispatchers:** Brent Gorman, Sr.; Brent Gorman, Jr.; Reid Brasher; Donnie Templeton; Jason Templeton; Dusty Dittmar; John Maertz; Ron Luedke; Pastor Alan Kethan; Kristi Weyand; Eric Weyand; Bradley Berger; Jon Berger; James Chollett; Edward Thraen, Jr.; Kyle Burris; Dylan Walcik; Travis Neuendorff; Nathan Bookout; Brenda Henkes; Jan Willette; and Terri Neuendorff. **Active Duty Military:** Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Dalton Kapel; Kevin Gonzalez; Evelyn Rojas.

► **Children's Activity Bags** are available for use by our young members and guests! You can find them on the coat hooks in the coat area of the narthex. After worship, **please**

place the used activity bags and their contents in the receptacle in the narthex.

Thank you! ☺

♥♥ Our next **Marriage Course** will be every Sunday, **September 17-October 29, 2023**. On these Sunday nights from **6:00-8:00 PM** in the Lighthouse this seven-week course will take place. We realize that strong marriages make strong families, and strong families make strong communities. The Marriage Course is relevant for any couple wanting to invest in their relationship and make it stronger. Whether you have been married four months, 40 years or cohabitating and not married; you feel your marriage is fine, good, great, struggling or stuck; this course is for you. The course is more like a date night. There will be dinner and dessert mixed in with video presentations and discussion questions for you and your partner. You will not be asked to share anything about your relationship with anyone but your partner. **Cost is \$150** – this includes meals, workbooks and video materials. If you need childcare, the cost is an additional \$35 for the seven weeks. This course is limited to 11 couples. Sign up in the office or call Elena Monday-Friday during business hours to get your name on the list. When you sign up, please indicate if you will need childcare.



A blood drive will be held in the Lighthouse on **Sunday, September 24, 2023 from 8:00 AM-12:30 PM**. You can sign up online by scanning the QR code on the poster in the hallway or by going to www.giveblood.org. **Sponsor code is P732**.

You may also call or text Melinda Zajicek at 979-820-8793 to sign up to donate.

Also, if you can help the day of the drive, please let Melinda know. Thank you for your donations! Put the next blood drive on your calendar, too, which will be *Sunday, December 3, 2023!*

◆ **God's Gals** will meet **Sunday, September 24, 2023 at 6:00 PM at Nancy's Steakhouse** in Columbus for food, fellowship, and visiting!! All women of St. Paul Lutheran are invited. Bring a friend! Questions? Please contact Terri Brasher at 979-732-1127. ◆

Peru Team Meeting: Our next Peru Team meeting will be **Thursday, September 28, 2023 at 5:00 PM** in the church library. Join us to get an update on Pastor Alan's trip to Peru in July and discuss how we can best serve our South American neighbors. If you have any question, please contact Terri Brasher at 979-732-1127.

+ The **Noon Bible Study group** that meets on Tuesdays in the church library is taking a brief break and will resume class Tuesday, October 3, 2023. They will be studying I & II Thessalonians and Jude. Everyone is invited to attend! +

► **National Night Out:** National Night Out will be held at **St. Paul Lutheran Church parking lot on Tuesday, October 3, 2023 from 6:00-7:30 PM**. We plan to have: hot dogs for all; cold

drinks; Praise Band playing; face painting; the Andrus' mules; Fire Department; EMS; Law Enforcement; Game Wardens and Texas Parks & Wildlife; Boy Scouts; balloons for the children; and more! Come, bring your bag chairs and/or lawn chairs and meet some neighbors!



**God's work.
Our hands.**

GOD'S WORK OUR HANDS: St. Paul will once again participate in the annual God's Work Our Hands day! This year we will work this event **Sunday, October 22, 2023**. The time will be **12:15-3:00 PM**. This is an opportunity for all ages to work together to bring about positive changes in our community. Please sign up on the sign-up sheet in the narthex (foyer). T-shirts are \$10 if you would like one. *The deadline to order T-shirts is Wednesday, October 11, 2023.*

♪♪ **SENIOR EXPLORERS:** Senior Explorers are heading to La Grange to “Czech” out the **Czech Heritage Fest and Muziky**. We will depart **St. Paul at 3:30 PM on Friday, October 20, 2023**. We will have time to browse in the Heritage Center before heading out to the main deck for the beginning of the festival. Chicken and dumplings will be served at 5:30 PM with Dujka Brothers playing at 6:00 PM. We plan to return to St. Paul by 7:00 PM – just in time for the Columbus football game. Lawn chairs are welcome, but no coolers. *Please sign up by Sunday, October 15, 2023 in the narthex.* For more information, please contact Kevin Page at 979-732-0845.



Pictures Needed!! I am in the process of changing all song backgrounds to royalty-free pictures for Power Point. Please send me any pictures of backgrounds (trees, rivers, oceans, mountains, etc.) you may have taken on your vacation. You can email them to peggeisler@gmail.com. Thanks! – *Peggy Geisler*

♥ **Grief Support Group:** Are you experiencing grief from the loss of a loved one, loss of a job, loss of friend who has moved? The Grief Support Group is a place to share and discuss these issues with other individuals. The group meets the **third Thursday of each month from 5:30-6:30 PM in the choir room**. For questions or more information, contact Peggy Geisler at 979-732-0350.

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Today (Sept. 17) – 6:00-8:00 PM – Marriage Course (Lighthouse)
Mon., Sept. 18 – 9:30 AM – Staff Meeting
1:00 PM – Nursing Home Team & Pastor to TLC
6:00 PM – Church Council
Tues., Sept. 19 – 10:00 AM – Pastor Alan to Columbus Oaks
5:30 PM – Prayer Team (library)

Wed., Sept. 20 – 9:00 AM – CLA Chapel
9:00 AM – Morning Circle (library)
10:00 AM-1:00 PM – Colorado County Senior Connections (Lighthouse)
1:30 PM – Neighbor-to-Neighbor Quarterly Meeting (library)
5:00 PM – Meal
5:30 PM – BLAST, Confirmation & HS Youth
Thurs., Sept. 21 – 5:30 PM – Grief Support Group (choir room)
Fri., Sept. 22 – 10:30 AM – Adult Bible Study (library)
Sat., Sept. 23 – 7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship
Next Sun., Sept. 24 – 8:00 AM-12:30 PM – Blood Drive (Lighthouse)
9:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship
10:00 AM – Adult Sunday School and Confirmation
11:05 AM – Holy Communion Contemporary Worship
12:00 PM – The Gathering to El Campo for Bowling
6:00 PM – God's Gals to Nancy's Steakhouse, Columbus
6:00-8:00 PM – Marriage Course (Lighthouse)

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Sunday, September 17, 2023 Hildegard, Abbess of Bingen, died 1179

A mystic who was widely influential within the church, Hildegard advised and reproved kings and popes, wrote poems and hymns, and produced treatises in medicine, theology, and natural history. She was also a musician and artist.

Monday, September 18, 2023 Dag Hammarskjöld, renewer of society, died 1961

A Swedish diplomat, Hammarskjöld served as the second Secretary General of the United Nations until his death in a plane crash while trying to negotiate peace in present-day Zambia. His journal, published as *Markings*, revealed the depth of his Christian faith.

Wednesday, September 20, 2023 Nelson Wesley Trout, bishop, died 1996 (TFF)

A native of Ohio, Trout served parishes in several parts of the United States before being elected bishop of the South Pacific District of the American Lutheran Church, the first African American Lutheran to serve in such a capacity.

Thursday, September 21, 2023 Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

Matthew (or Levi) was a tax collector in Capernaum for the Roman government. Tax collectors were frequently despised for dishonesty and for assisting the occupiers. Jesus nevertheless showed love for them, and chose Matthew to be a disciple.

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PSALM: Psalm 103:[1-7] 8-13

[¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name. ²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits — ³who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases; ⁴who redeems your life from the grave and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy;

⁵who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's. ⁶O LORD, you provide vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. ⁷You made known your ways to Moses and your works to the children of Israel.] ⁸LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love; ⁹you will not always accuse us, nor will you keep your anger forever. ¹⁰You have not dealt with us according to our sins, nor repaid us according to our iniquities. ¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is your steadfast love for those who fear you. ¹²As far as the east is from the west, so far have you removed our transgressions from us. ¹³As a father has compassion for his children, so you have compassion for those who fear you, O LORD.

OTHER READINGS: Romans 14:1-12

This Christian community has significant struggles with diversity. Here Paul helps us understand that despite different practices in worship and personal piety, we do not judge one another. All Christians belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who died for all of us and will judge each of us.

The reading begins:

¹Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. ⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. ⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

SERVICE OVERVIEW: THE CHALLENGE TO FORGIVE

Being a disciple requires an expansive perspective of forgiveness. Today our perspective is broadened by the good news that God's forgiveness is not based on our idea of fairness, but rather on abundant, unimaginable grace. The Psalm reminds us that God does not deal with us according to our sins or repay us according to our iniquities. The king forgives our entire debt, no matter how enormous it is! Challenge yourself to stretch your perspective and forgive. In the gospel today with Peter, we learn to stop keeping score.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

Today's gospel is a harsh parable about forgiveness. Do you feel condemned by the reading?

Take heart! We ALL receive God's mercy. Welcome to worship! You are forgiven. Be empowered to forgive others.

"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." We hear and say these words every week in worship and personal prayer. Jesus tells Peter he should forgive someone seventy-seven times. This number isn't really an upper limit; instead, we learn that God's boundless grace is a model for how we are to forgive. After we have hurt someone, most of us have experienced the challenge and relief of apologizing and being forgiven. Explore the feeling of being forgiven for your sin against another person. You can help others feel that freedom and sense of relief when you forgive.

Forgiveness is not an easy thing to do. Again and again we fall back on a limited human understanding of what is "fair." Looking at the story of Joseph and his brothers from Genesis, it's easy for us to say that his brothers really didn't deserve forgiveness. Even their plea for forgiveness is dishonest and manipulative - have they really repented? Joseph takes the wider view. He realizes that it isn't his brothers' intentions that matter, but God's. God's forgiveness is much greater than what is fair, much greater than what we deserve.

Thorny issues, power struggles, and pain abound in families, faith communities, cities, and nations. What does a new, broadened perspective look like in our lives as Christians? Naming sources of shame and hurt is a critical first step to healing. If you believe that all are truly welcomed by God, you are also called to share the good news of that welcome in all you say and do.

We all know that forgiveness isn't as simple as just saying "I forgive you." It's difficult work, and it takes practice. Like the king in the story, sometimes we try to forgive, but we keep the offense in the back of our minds, ready to reinstate it if the opportunity arises. The story illustrates the awful consequences of this failure to truly forgive. So keep practicing – with the understanding that although we may fall short in our personal efforts to forgive, God forgives completely.

KID STUDY:

How many times do you think a person should be forgiven for doing something wrong? Once? Twice? Three times? Jesus' disciple (student) Peter guessed seven times. Jesus surprised the group when he replied that the number of times a person should be forgiven is not seven, but seventy times seven! That's 490 times! Jesus was trying to get Peter to understand that we shouldn't worry about keeping count of how many times we forgive someone. We should just keep on forgiving just like God continues to forgive us. Give thanks to God for loving us and forgiving us without keeping count. Try your best to forgive other people because God has forgiven you.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

The evil of remembering past offenses is twofold: it is inexcusable before God, and it serves to recall past sins already forgiven and places them against us. Nothing whatsoever does God so

hate, and turn away from, as cherishing remembrance of past offenses and fostering our anger against another. If we must remember offenses, let us remember only our own. If we remember our own sins, we shall never store up the sins of others. I shall make bold to say that this sin is more grievous than any other sin. Let us be zealous in nothing so much as in keeping ourselves free from anger and from not seeking to be reconciled with those who are opposed to us. Neither is this my word only, but the word of that God who shall come to judge us. - John Chrysostom [John Chrysostom, in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, IV, 289.]

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Next Week's Theme (Sept. 23 & 24): God's freedom to give to the last the same as the first / Laborers in the vineyard

Next Week's Scriptures (Sept. 23 & 24):

First Reading: Jonah 3:10 - - 4:11

"God's concern for the city of Nineveh."

Psalm: Psalm 145:1-8

"The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." (Ps. 145:8)

Second Reading: Philippians 1:21-30

"Standing firm in the gospel."

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

"The parable of the vineyard workers."