



'Worship at home' Sunday September 17th 2023

We come to worship God,
who we find in the holy spaces
and the ordinary places of our lives,
sometimes in unexpected ways.

You might bring with you a **piece of paper**
and **pen/pencil** to aid your prayer time.



Opening

Praise the Lord, my soul!

The Lord forgives our sins, bringing healing and grace.

The Lord restores and renews us in love.

The Lord brings righteousness and justice for the oppressed.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.

Praise the Lord, my soul!

from Psalm 103

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," answered Jesus, "but seventy times seven, because the Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants' accounts. He had just begun to do so when one of them was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. The servant did not have enough to pay his debt, so

the king ordered him to be sold as a slave, with his wife and his children and all that he had, in order to pay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before the king. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay you everything!" The king felt sorry for him, so he forgave him the debt and let him go. "Then the man went out and met one of his fellow servants who owed him a few dollars. He grabbed him and started choking him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he said. His fellow servant fell 1

down and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!" But he refused; instead, he had him thrown into jail until he should pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very upset and went to the king and told him everything. So he called the servant in. "You worthless slave!" he said. "I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just

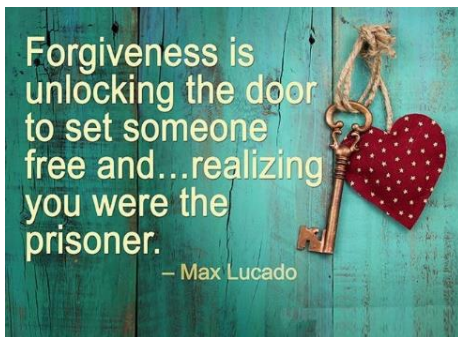
because you asked me to. You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you.' The king was very angry, and he sent the servant to jail to be punished until he should pay back the whole amount." And Jesus concluded, "That is how my Father in heaven will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." *Good News Bible*

We do not always find it easy to forgive. When someone "sins against us", we often feel hurt. Many of us know the sting of unresolved personal conflict, or the deep pain of a broken relationship. Jewish teaching was that a man must forgive his brother three times, but on the fourth occasion they did not have to. When Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive, his own suggestion of seven was generous. However, Jesus' answer went far beyond the expectation... 70 x 7... too many times to count. Jesus continued with a story about a servant who owed such a large amount he was never going to be able to pay it back. The servant received extravagant mercy from the king.



In economic terms, if a debt is forgiven, it no longer needs to be paid. It does not mean that the debt never occurred, however it is wiped clean, unconditionally, without any sense of judgement or ongoing obligation. Jesus suggested here that when we forgive someone, we renounce any claim to retribution or reward, and wipe it clean. That does not mean that the injury never occurred, nor that we accept the behaviour of one who caused harm. Jesus didn't say that forgiveness means saying everything is ok, or remaining with someone who persists 2

in wounding us. We may not be able to change the behaviour of another, or alter what they have done. However, we have power over how we respond. **To offer forgiveness means that we refuse to allow another's sin to hold us or control us.** Rather than holding on to the hurt and pain that has been caused, we choose to wipe it clean and move on. This is difficult to do, as difficult as forfeiting an unimaginably large amount of money. It is countercultural, going far beyond anything that might be expected or deserved and sometimes requires us to do so again and again and again, too many times to count. Forgiving others liberates us. It allows us to leave behind that which has hurt us, and start again. It is in the forgiving that we find healing.



The story went on to tell of that same servant who then refused to forgive a tiny debt from his colleague. For this, he received harsh punishment. You may have experienced how an unforgiving heart can fester inside and cause more pain and suffering than the original injury.

***To forgive any more
than the once
sounds tough
and seven times
seems crazy.
Yet to stretch the score
to seventy
times seven
becomes profoundly easy.***

***We only travel well
on the paths of mercy,
when we have made
the choice
to break from the prison
of “our own rights”
and to find pleasure
in the unfenced grounds
of love.***

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This story challenges each of us to consider what we might be called to let go of. Is there harm or pain you are holding on to? Where is God in that for you?



You are invited to think of a person you feel has wronged or hurt you, and whom you would choose to forgive.

*Write **“I forgive you”** on your piece of paper.*

Draw a line on your paper, marking one time you forgive that person. Prayerfully continue marking your piece of paper, drawing a line for each time you forgive them, and asking God’s help to be able to do so.

After a while, you might find you stop counting and just continue marking, and praying. This is indeed what we are asked to do... to stop counting and just continue forgiving...

Forgiving others in this way is difficult, and we all fall short. Most of us are unable to let go of hurt without the grace of God working in our lives. The hurt can be very deep, and forgiveness can take time. Be gentle on yourself, knowing that forgiveness only comes with God’s help. **Remember that God also forgives us 70 x 7... more times than we can count.**



*Write **“I am forgiven”** on your piece of paper. Remind yourself of this and make a mark, and another, and another, aware that God continues to forgive you, again and again.*

You are forgiven, a beloved child of God.

Pray for other people and situations where there is hurt and conflict and ask God for reconciliation in these situations.



Closing: Keep your piece of paper handy this week. When you feel wronged or hurt by another, remind yourself of the challenge to forgive, and to forgive again. When you know you fall short, remind yourself that you are forgiven, and forgiven again. Give thanks for God’s extravagant mercy, bringing healing and grace.