

SEPTEMBER 13, 2026
16TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "If I Have Wounded Any Soul" Stewart Landon

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Deaconess Parish Nursing Ministries

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: Tremble, O earth, at the presence of God.

Let us remember God's marvelous works.

MANY: Surely God has saved us in difficult times.

How can we forget God's guiding hand?

ONE: When evil surrounds us and we have been wronged, God helps us turn the evil to good.

MANY: We need not be afraid whatever happens. We are in God's care wherever we go.

ONE: Sing the praises of God, our strength. Know that God is majestic and holy.

MANY: How great is God's mercy for all who worship!

We sense among us God's kindness and patience.

***INVOCATION:** Majestic God, who led our spiritual ancestors with a pillar of cloud that hid them by day and protected them by night, lead us through the threatening times in which we live. Save us from the floods of our own misplaced trust, as you saved them from the waters of the sea and the weapons of their pursuers.

On this day, grant strength to those who are weak and support for all who are stumbling. Let every tongue praise you as we give account to you for our deeds. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 18 “Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer”**

***CALL TO CONFESSION:** Why do we pass judgment on our brothers and sisters? Why do we quarrel with those whose ways are different from our own? How can we despise another who is also a child of God? How can we ignore the suffering of other human beings? Surely we have much to confess to our God.

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

We bow before your judgment seat, O God. We have ranked our sisters and brothers by the faulty standards of our society to decide who is worthy of our attention.

We have rejected those whom we dislike and have been harsh with those we think do not measure up. We have been quite willing to overlook our own faults as we look down on other people. O God, you have shown us a better way. Save us from the pain we inflict and help us to discover the blessing of forgiveness. Silent confession

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:**

God has pity on us and releases us from the debts we have accumulated. In the great design of the universe, we are equipped to receive this forgiveness only when we extend it to others. Jesus points us to unlimited willingness to forgive – seventy times seven. How amazing is God’s love for us, and God’s expectation of us!

***GLORIA:**

Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)

(end) One God always here. One God always here.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

OLD TESTAMENT: Exodus 14:19-31

¹⁹ God's messenger, who had been in front of Israel's camp, moved and went behind them. The column of cloud moved from the front and took its place behind them. ²⁰ It stood between Egypt's camp and Israel's camp. The cloud remained there, and when darkness fell it lit up the night. They didn't come near each other all night.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord pushed the sea back by a strong east wind all night, turning the sea into dry land. The waters were split into two. ²² The Israelites walked into the sea on dry ground. The waters formed a wall for them on their right hand and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians chased them and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and cavalry. ²⁴ As morning approached, the Lord looked down on the Egyptian camp from the column of lightning and cloud and threw the Egyptian camp into a panic. ²⁵ The Lord jammed their chariot wheels so that they wouldn't turn easily. The Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites, because the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt!"

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the water comes back and covers the Egyptians, their chariots, and their cavalry." ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. At daybreak, the sea returned to its normal depth. The Egyptians were driving toward it, and the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the cavalry, Pharaoh's entire army that had followed them into the sea. Not one of them remained. ²⁹ The Israelites, however, walked on dry ground through the sea. The waters formed a wall for them on their right hand and on their left.

³⁰ The Lord rescued Israel from the Egyptians that day. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the amazing power of

the Lord against the Egyptians. The people were in awe of the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 14:1-12 The words of Paul

Welcoming each other like Christ

14 Welcome the person who is weak in faith—but not in order to argue about differences of opinion. ² One person believes in eating everything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Those who eat must not look down on the ones who don't, and the ones who don't eat must not judge the ones who do, because God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servants? They stand or fall before their own Lord (and they will stand, because the Lord has the power to make them stand). ⁵ One person considers some days to be more sacred than others, while another person considers all days to be the same. Each person must have their own convictions. ⁶ Someone who thinks that a day is sacred, thinks that way for the Lord. Those who eat, eat for the Lord, because they thank God. And those who don't eat, don't eat for the Lord, and they thank the Lord too. ⁷ We don't live for ourselves and we don't die for ourselves. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to God. ⁹ This is why Christ died and lived: so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you look down on your brother or sister? We all will stand in front of the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ Because it is written,
*As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me,
and every tongue will give praise to God.*
¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 18:21-35**

Parable of the unforgiving servant

²¹ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?”

²² Jesus said, “Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times. ²³ Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle accounts, they brought to him a servant who owed him ten thousand bags of gold. ²⁵ Because the servant didn’t have enough to pay it back, the master ordered that he should be sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, and that the proceeds should be used as payment. ²⁶ But the servant fell down, kneeled before him, and said, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’ ²⁷ The master had compassion on that servant, released him, and forgave the loan.

²⁸ “When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred coins. He grabbed him around the throat and said, ‘Pay me back what you owe me.’

²⁹ “Then his fellow servant fell down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’ ³⁰ But he refused. Instead, he threw him into prison until he paid back his debt.

³¹ “When his fellow servants saw what happened, they were deeply offended. They came and told their master all that happened. ³² His master called the first servant and said, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you appealed to me. ³³ Shouldn’t you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ His master was furious and handed him over to the guard responsible for punishing prisoners, until he had paid the whole debt.

³⁵ “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don’t forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

MESSAGE: Forgiveness – what it is and what it is not

We owe a very great deal to the fact that Peter had a quick tongue. Again and again, he rushed into speech in such a way that his impulsiveness drew from Jesus teaching.

On this occasion, Peter thought that he was being very generous. He asked Jesus how often he ought to forgive someone, and then answered his own question by suggesting that he should forgive seven times.

Just to be clear, Peter was not far off for this suggestion. It was Rabbinic teaching that a person must forgive another three times. Rabbi Jose ben Hanina said: “He who begs forgiveness from his neighbor must not do so more than three times.” Another Rabbi teacher said, “If a man commits an offense once, they forgive him; if he commits an offence a second time, they forgive him; if he commits an offence a third time, they forgive him; the fourth time they do not forgive.”

The biblical proof that this was correct was taken from the prophet Amos. In the opening chapters of Amos, there is a series of condemnations on the various nations for three transgressions and for four.

From this, it was deduced that God’s forgiveness extends to three offences and that he visits the sinner with punishment at the fourth. It was not to be thought that people could be more gracious than God, so forgiveness was limited to three times.

Peter thought that he was going very far, for he takes the Rabbinic three times, multiplies it by two, for good measure adds one, and suggests, with eager self-satisfaction, that it will be enough if he forgives seven times.

Peter expected to be warmly commended; but Jesus’ answer was that the person following Jesus must forgive seventy times seven. In other words, there is no quantifiable limit to forgiveness.

Before we talk about Jesus' parable, I want to relate to you something that the Rev. Fred Craddock wrote in his commentary on forgiveness:

"In the final analysis, that which creates and sustains the Christian community is forgiveness. Forgiveness is NOT, of course, carelessness or indifference to wrong. It is NOT permissiveness or the absence of any sense of ethical standards. On the contrary, there can be no forgiveness without standards and values being violated, without persons and relationships being hurt, without a loss so deeply felt that efforts at restoration are pursued.

"From a distance, forgiveness may look like condoning or permissiveness, but in reality, forgiveness takes the violators, the violated, and the violation most seriously. To be forgiven is to be taken seriously. Forgiveness does not repeal, revoke, abolish, or nullify but fulfills righteousness."

Jesus told the parable you just read in the Gospel. This story teaches certain lessons which Jesus never tired of teaching.

#1 This lessons runs all through the New Testament – we must forgive in order to be forgiven. Those who will not forgive others, cannot hope that God will forgive them.

In Matthew 5:7 we read, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." In Matthew 6:14-15, we read Jesus' words, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

And in James 2:13 we can read, "For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy." Divine and human forgiveness go hand in hand.

So there it is plain and simple, forgive and you will be forgiven.

#2 BUT THERE IS ANOTHER LESSON FOR US. The lesson has to do with the amounts of the debts, some very large and others merely a fraction of that.

The huge point of this story is that nothing that others can do to us can in any way compare with what we have done to God;(REPEAT) and if God has forgiven us the debt we owe to God, we must forgive our neighbors the debts they owe to us.

Nothing that we have to forgive can even faintly or remotely compare with what we have been forgiven.

We have been forgiven a debt which is beyond all paying – for human sin brought about the death of God’s own Son – and if that is so, we must forgive others as God has forgiven us, or we can find no mercy for ourselves.

Thanks be to God for our lesson today. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Our ever-faithful God, it’s true, we have some trying times now, just as we did in the past, but you never leave us. God is with us, even when we can’t see God, we can see how God loves us. Even when think we know better; God knows best and guides us in the correct direction. And we are grateful.

Thank you God for comforting those who are in pain, those who are mourning the death of a loved one, those who are in the hospital, those who are in nursing homes, those who struggle with addiction, those who are lonely.

Thank you for giving us your servants who are your hands and feet; they who work in hospitals or nursing homes, those who make phone calls to the lonely or send cards and those who feed the hungry.

We pray for all those who serve the people of our country. May they serve with clarity and charity.

We pray all these things in the name of your son Jesus.

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

PRAYER RESPONSE: 774

**Shepherd lead, lead me in your righteousness,
Make your way plain before my face.
For it is you, God. You, God only,
who makes me to lie down in safety.**

OFFERTORY INVITATION:

We are indebted to the Creator for all we have and for the precious gift of life itself. Nothing we can do will ever begin to repay this debt. Therefore, with gratitude, we extend to others the gracious acceptance and generosity we have experienced. Let us thank God with our offerings.

OFFERTORY: "Lead Me, Savior" Roger C. Wilson

***DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

***UNISON OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

We honor you, O God, as we give. We know we do not live or die to ourselves but are a part of a large community, linked in ways beyond our knowing with you and all generations of your children. We are accountable to you and share in responsibility for one another and for the care of this planet. Thus, we dedicate our resources and our lives to you for the work of your realm. Receive our gifts and draw us to yourself. Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION

(Romans 14:1-12, Matthew 18:21-35)

Invitation to communion:

Come to the table, for all are welcome here.

Come to the meal, for all will be fed.

Come into God's presence, for all are forgiven here.

Come join in the feast of unconditional love.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth.

From ancient times, you created us in your image, called us to be your people, and led us from our willful ways onto the paths of life.

In your compassion and forgiveness, when we were lost and afraid, you delivered us from captivity, and offered us a new beginning and a fresh hope for the future. Even when we turned away, you continued to walk with us, extending the hand of forgiveness and steadfast love.

In the words of the prophets, you called us back to faithful living and offered us your wisdom and your truth. And in the fullness of time, you sent your Son, Christ Jesus, to reveal your forgiveness, and to call us to reconciling relationships and faithful living.

And so, with your people on earth, and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn, saying;

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Holy are you and blessed is your salvation and grace, Jesus Christ. Through Christ's patient love and unfailing grace, you invite us into your presence, rescue us from our sins, and lead us in your path of righteousness.

With Christ's presence in our lives, you forgive our wayward feet, cover us with your grace, and invite us into fullness of life and love. In remembrance and gratitude, we break this bread and remember Jesus' words of invitation: "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

As we fill this cup, we give you thanks and remember Jesus' words of life: "Drink from this, all of you. This is my life poured out for you, and for many, in a new covenant for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts of love and grace, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine, that we might rejoice in your presence and find forgiveness in your name. Cover us with your love, that by your Spirit we might be one with Christ, one in reconciliation with each other, and one in the ministry of love to the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at your heavenly banquet.

Through Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty God, now and forevermore. Amen.

SHARING THE BREAD AND CUP

The love of Christ, living in through you.

The forgiveness of God, working through you.

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

We give thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 499 "In All Our Living"**

***RESPONSIVE COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

We have observed this day to honor God.

God's promises go with us as we depart.

God upholds us and helps us to stand.

We are grateful that God strengthens our faith.

We do not live or die to ourselves.

Christ has claimed us and offered us life.

From Christ, we have learned to forgive.

We have been taught to value every person.

Let every knee bow daily before our God.

Let every tongue give praise to the Almighty.

God helps us turn evil into good.

Every day we can know God's loving presence.

Amen. Amen.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571**

O God of Love, O God of Peace

Make wars throughout the world to cease.

**The wrath of human wrong restrain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.**

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: "Surely Goodness and Mercy" Roger C. Wilson

PRAYER LIST: Carol Bulva (broken shoulder) Jim Warning, Pattie French, Kim Holmes, Nancy W., Becky Ballard, Russ Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury, Wayne Huss, our Beloved Country.