

Wesley Uniting Church
September 17th, 2023
10.45am Liturgy
Pentecost 16



The Gathering of God's People

Prelude Etude No. 6 from Trente-six Etudes Transcendentes Théo Charlier (1868-1944)

Introit Have Mercy, Lord, On Me John Broderip, words by Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady, on Psalm 51

Have mercy, Lord, on me
As thou wert ever kind;
Let me, opprest with loads of guilt,
Thy wonted mercy find.

Do thou unlock my lips
With sorrow closed and shame;
So shall my mouth thy wondrous praise
To all the world proclaim.

Affirmation of First Nation's People & Celebration of Mutual Acceptance

Welcome and Invocation of the Trinity

Lighting of the Paschal and Community Candle

Call to Worship

You are a God who saves, who liberates.

You are a God who creates room for people to live.

You are a God of freedom.

You are a God who teaches us to live in mercy and forgiveness.

Hymn TIS 569, Guide me O thou great Redeemer (Cwm Rhondda, William Williams)

Prayer of Adoration

Prayer of Confession

This prayer arises from the Gospel reading for today, Matthew 18:21-35, but does so through metaphor, upon which I invite you meditate. Each metaphor is different, and it may take some effort to comprehend each in its own right. The thrust of these metaphors is *toward life*. That life without forgiveness – received and given – is not more nor less than death, death before death, death before we actually die.

Forgiveness is sending flowers
with a card of congratulations
to one who has come through
their anger: yourself.

Forgiveness is taking the stone
that broke the blade of the plough
and transferring it to the centre
of your garden.

Lord have mercy.

Forgiveness is digging a hole
into cracked and thirsty earth
and not just pouring in water
but planting a tree.

Forgiveness is emptying the goblet
into which you poured the poison
and placing it, clean and shining,
on the farthest shelf.

Forgiveness is shaking loose
the pinched, cracked skin
you have been living in
and leaving it behind for the crows.

Christ have mercy.

Forgiveness is tearing in two the curtains
that enclosed your heart's hurting
and letting in the dusty light
to bathe the wound.

Forgiveness is removing the pins
from the wings of two
dead butterflies
and watching both those butterflies
fly away free.

Lord have mercy.

Affirmation of Forgiveness and Release

We have been forgiven.

We are free to become people of forgiveness, mercy and kindness.

Thanks be to God.

The Peace

The Service of the Word

Prayer for Understanding

First Reading: Exodus 14:19-3, pages 53-54
Epistle: Romans 14:1-12, pages 923-924

Choir

Gospel: Matthew 18: 21-35, page 800

This is the Gospel of the Lord,
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

Homily

Offering

Hymn TIS 653 This is a day of new beginnings (Beginnings, Brian Arthur Wren)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Today we pray for the peoples of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. We also pray for the peoples of Morocco and Libya.

Bidding: O God, in and through Jesus Christ,
Show your mercy.

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.*

Give us today our daily bread.

*Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.*

*Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.*

*For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.*

The Sending Out of the People of God

Announcements

Hymn TIS 367, The strife is past, the battle done (Sung to AHB 287 II)

1. The strife is o'er, the battle done;
now is the victor's triumph won;
O let the song of praise be sung: Alleluia!

2. Death's mightiest powers have done their worst,
and Jesus hath his foes dispersed;
let shouts of praise and joy outburst: Alleluia!

3. On the third morn he rose again
glorious in majesty to reign;
let us awake and join the strain: Alleluia!

4. He closed the frowning gates of hell;
the bars from heaven's high portals fell;
let hymns of praise his triumph tell: Alleluia!

5. Lord, by the stripes which wounded thee,
from death's dread sting thy servants free,
that we may live, and sing to thee, 'Alleluia!'.

Commission and Blessing

Postlude

Liturgist and Preacher: Rev'd Dr Geoff Dornan

Music Coordinator: Jade McFaul

Organist: Mary Ann Neilson

Musicians: James Monroe (cell), Jess Hill (trumpet), Elsa Huber & Martin Magill (choir)

Bible Reader: Elizabeth Wetherell

Flowers: Heather Hart

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Today's Themes

In the readings today, we continue the themes of last week: forgiveness and freedom. The Hebrew reading is arguably the most important reading within the whole of the Old Testament – it is a privilege to read it – concerning the liberation of the Hebrew slaves (*apiru*). Christians often make the error that redemption (salvation) is a spiritual thing, disconnected from material reality. Redemption is always a concrete thing that has to do with the building of the reign, the rule of God in the real world.

The New Testament readings of Romans and Matthew take up these themes in new ways, arising from their contexts. For Paul, the challenge is to navigate Christian faith that may become a source of life for people, not something that is rule bound, frozen in time. The Gospel, the story of the unmerciful servant, deepens the idea of forgiveness, of release, of liberation, as central to the free community which Christianity seeks to create.