



Lord, how often
should I forgive?

MATTHEW 18:21

Sunday, September 17, 2023
16th Sunday after Pentecost



48 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY ~ (585) 223-0634 ~ www.blcfairport.org
The Rev. Abigail Zang Hoffman and The Rev. Amy Walter-Peterson, co-Pastors

Sunday, September 17, 2023 ~ 16th Sunday after Pentecost

PRELUDE

Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive

DETROIT
setting, Edwin T. Childs

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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.

GATHERING

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be God, the one who forms us, † Jesus who bears the cross, the Spirit who makes our joy complete.

Amen.

Let us bow before God in humility, confessing our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Steadfast and faithful God,
you have revealed the ways of justice, yet we fail to follow you. We are overwhelmed by the world's violence and suffering. We are afraid to risk what we have for the sake of others. For the harm we have caused, known and unknown, forgive us. For the unjust demands we place on others and your creation, forgive us. For the ways we turn away from you and our neighbor, forgive us. Lead us back to you and set us on the right path; in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Beloved in Christ, God's justice stretches beyond all understanding. God's compassion is beyond compare. In Jesus, God is always making a new way for us. In † Christ, you are already and always forgiven.

Amen.

GATHERING HYMN

Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death

ELW 452

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Softly and Tenderly (Jesus Is Calling)

Will L. Thompson
arr. Tull Glazener

BLC Dulcimers

HEARING GOD'S WORD

DISMISSAL TO WORSHIP FOR KIDS

All kids ages 3 through elementary are welcome to a special time of hearing the Word, conversation and activity! Parents can remain in the sanctuary while the kids gather in the room across the hall from the side entrance to the sanctuary. Kids will return during the offering so they can participate in Communion.

READING: 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.

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.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



Al - le - lu - ia. Lord, to whom shall we go?

Al - le - lu - ia. You have the words of e - ter - nal life.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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.

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.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY

Where Charity and Love Prevail

ELW 359

APOSTLES' CREED

Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith.

**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 PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Our prayers are always offered on behalf of the whole community.

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

A brief silence.

#1 We pray for the church. Bless the missions and ministries of diverse congregations, that they uplift the good news of salvation in ways that can be understood. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

#2 We pray for creation. Send rain to lands experiencing drought and healing to rivers clogged with pollution. Enrich the soil for trees and plants. Protect the crops needed to feed those who hunger. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

#3 We pray for all who govern. Encourage those in positions of power to lead with empathy, practice forgiveness, and care for those who struggle. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

By the power of your Spirit, you build us into your beloved community. Strengthen the connections we share with these members and friends of Bethlehem and their families: Brad & Debbie, Bill & Jeanine, Jessica, Julia, Michael, and Peter. Strengthen the ministries we share with others, especially our twinned parish in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Extend your arms of mercy to those struggling in body, mind, or spirit.

We pray for those who are grieving, especially the family and friends of:

- Julie R-S, friend of Kim K, who died on 8/30
- Pam, daughter of Jim S, who died on 8/31

We pray for those in need of healing, especially:

- Mary S, who is transitioning to a new placement in memory care
- Dawn, niece of Sue T, who is recovering from kidney stone surgery
- Bill B, brother of Sue C, who has been diagnosed with bladder cancer

Hear these prayers we raise to you in our hearts or on our voice.

Silence for individual prayer.

Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

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.
Amen.

SHARING GOD'S MEAL

THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

*Share the peace in a way that cares for friend and neighbor.
If you worship virtually, share the peace through the comments section or text.*

OFFERING

Information about supporting Bethlehem's ministry with your offerings is available in the Welcome insert in your pew rack or by visiting blcfairport.org/support-our-ministry.

OFFERING OF MUSIC

How Sweet the Sound
(Amazing Grace)

text, John Newton / tune, W. Walker
arr. Samuel Adler

The Chancel Choir

OFFERTORY



Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of



bles - sing. Gath - er a har - vest from the seeds that were



sown, that we may be fed with the bread of life.



Gath-er the hopes and dreams of all; u - nite them with the prayers we



of - fer now. Grace our ta - ble with your pres - ence,



Lord, and give us a fore-taste of the feast to come.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray. 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.**

Amen.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Lord Jesus, you are resurrection and life.

**We give thanks that at your table you fill us with good things and feed us
from your abundance.**

Pour out your Spirit on us and this feast of love.

**Build us into a lasting community that embodies your love. Strengthen us to
serve you in all we do. Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

One in body, one in Spirit, we pray as Jesus taught us:

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

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

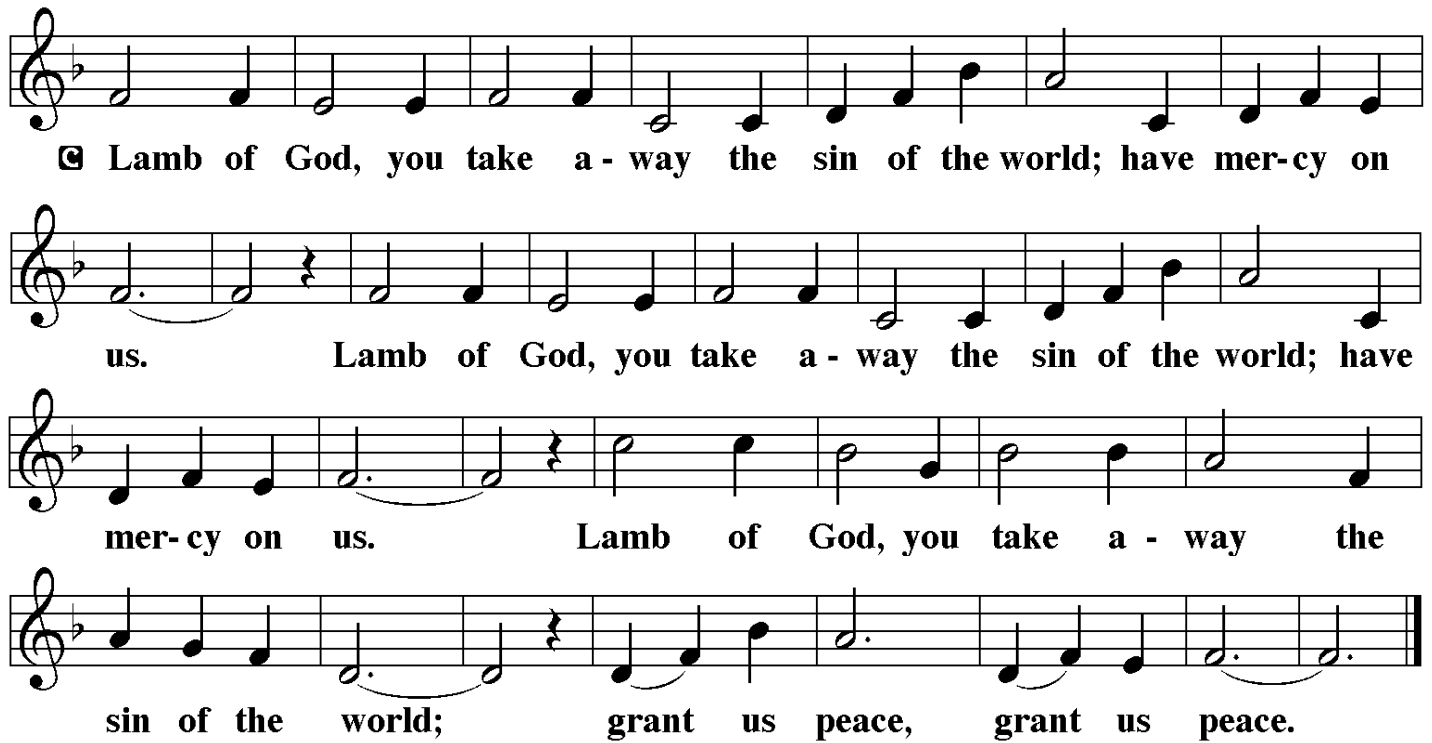
Jesus invites you to this table. Come, eat and live.

Thanks be to God!

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

Our communion bread is gluten-free, unless noted by the pastor. Grape juice is available; indicate your need to the communion assistant. If you worship through the Livestream and wish to receive communion, please reach out to one of the pastors.

THE COMMUNION



☞ Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on
us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have
mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

COMMUNION HYMN

Here Would I Feast

ACS 964

Stanzas 1, 2, 3: Choir

1, 2, 3: All

Here Would I Feast

Aquí del pan partido tomaré



1 A - quí del pan par - ti - do to - ma - ré,
2 La cul - pa del pe - ca - do mi - a fue;
1 Here would I feast up - on the bread of God,
2 Mine is the sin, but thine the righ - teous - ness;



y de la co - pa de tu co - mu - nión;
mas tu - ya fue la san - gre de tu cruz.
here drink with thee the roy - al wine of heav'n;
mine is the guilt, but thine the cleans - ing blood;



tu nom - bre, mi buen Dios, in vo - ca - ré
Por e - lla y tu jus - ti - cia ten - go, sé,
here would I lay a - side each earth - ly load,
here is my robe, my ref - uge, and my peace:



y go - za - ré la paz de sal - va - ción.
per - dón, con - sue - lo y paz, Se - ñor Je - sús.
here taste a - fresh the calm of sin for - giv'n.
thy blood, thy righ - teous - ness, O Lord my God.



3 *Nos le - van - ta - mos de la ce - na_a - quí;*
3 Too soon we rise, the ves - sels dis - ap - pear;



la fies - ta pa - sa, mas no_a - sí_el a - mor.
the feast, though not the love, is past and gone.



To - do se va, mas tú te que - das, sí,
The bread and wine re - move, but thou art here,



cer - ca, muy cer - ca_a - ma - do Sal - va - dor.
near - er than ev - er, still my shield and sun.

COMMUNION HYMN

Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive

ELW 605

TABLE BLESSING

POST-COMMUNION CANTICLE

☞ Thank - ful hearts and voic - es raise; tell ev - 'ry -
one what God has done. Let all who seek the
Lord re - jice and bear Christ's ho - ly name.
Send us with your prom - is - es, O God, and
lead us forth in joy with shouts of thanks -
giv - ing. Al - le - lu - ia.

THANKSGIVING FOR THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION FOR PASTOR AMY
WALTER-PETERSON

LEAVING TO SERVE

BENEDICTION

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in † Christ Jesus.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN	O Christ, Your Heart, Compassionate	ELW 722
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DISMISSAL

Go in peace. God is at work in you.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Allegro

from “Autumn” – *The Four Seasons*, op. 8, no. 3

Antonio Vivaldi

ed./arr. S. Drummond Wolff

BLC Musicians

Raelynn Clare, Music Director and Organist

Dr. Jim Jefferis, Director of The Chancel Choir

Rich Towsley, Director of The Folk Group and BLC Dulcimers

Thank you to all those who participated in worship this Sunday! Want to learn more about what roles are needed in worship or sign-up for a pre-scheduled role? Talk with Mark Finke or one of the pastors following worship or contact Mark directly at volunteersupport@blcfairport.org.

Communicate with us: Share more about who you are, request further information, or leave a prayer request or comment through our website - <https://blcfairport.org/share-in-worship/> - scroll down the page to request or share information.

What's happening at BLC this week? Visit the Calendar of Events at www.blcfairport.org. Zoom links for virtual meetings are also found there. If you would like to schedule a meeting or event, please email the church office at office@blcfairport.org or visit <https://blcfairport.org/blc-facility-request/>

Church office hours: Our co-Pastors are available Sunday-Thursday and on-call for emergencies. Contact them directly to schedule an appointment either by calling (585) 223-0634 or emailing pastor.hoffman@blcfairport.org or pastor.amy@blcfairport.org.

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New Perspective

Being a disciple requires an expansive perspective on 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. God "does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103:10). The king forgives our entire debt, no matter how enormous it is (Matt. 18:23-27). We also are challenged to stretch our perspective and forgive each other. With Peter, we learn to stop keeping score (Matt. 18:21-22).

It's not an easy thing to do. Again and again we fall back on limited human understandings of what is "fair." Looking at the story of Joseph and his brothers, 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 (Gen. 50:15-21)? Joseph takes the wider view and realizes that it isn't his brothers' intentions that matter, but God's. God's forgiveness is much greater than what is fair, what we deserve.

So what does this new, broadened perspective look like in the lives of Christians and congregations? Paul provides a pragmatic glimpse: "Those 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" (Rom. 14:3). If all are truly welcomed by God, we are called to share the good news of that welcome in all we say and do.