

Countryside Trinity Church Connections

April 3, 2020 Edition

From Pastor Brant...

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive others...

Continuing in our series on the Lord's Prayer, in which Jesus offers us this prayer in response to an invitation from the disciples to *"teach us to pray,"* we explore the next petition, this one in which we bring before God our complete dependence upon God for the gift of forgiveness. Just as the previous petition has us recognize our dependence upon God for the bread for life, this petition has us focus on the necessity of forgiveness for life together.

This petition stands out from the others due to its structure. As I write this, I am also preparing a lesson on what seems to be a mirror of this petition, the beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Both of these make clear that there is a relationship between our receiving forgiveness and our willingness to offer it, and conversely our offering of it, depends upon our willingness to recognize our need to receive it. It reminds us that forgiveness is a gift, a gift that is only truly given if it is freely given. We are completely dependent upon the graciousness of another; If the other does not release us from the wrongs they have endured, we are burdened with the knowing that our actions hurt another, and are powerless to unburden ourselves.

This petition starts by introducing us to an interesting way of understanding our "sin" through the use of the word "debt." In his study on the Lord's Prayer in the "Being Reformed" series, Thomas Gillespie says, "To speak of sins in terms of debts is to focus on something *owed* to God—an obligation." He continues, "...our lives are a divine investment that expects the dividends of our living according to God's creative intention and thus to God's glory and our own." As people who are given the gifts of creation, who are created to enjoy God forever, our unwillingness to live in complete obedience to our Creator means we are turning away from are callings.

Gillespie continues, as he associates our obligations for living to be not only directed towards God, but also towards others. "Our sinful behaviors, when understood as failure to meet relational obligations, is sand in the machinery of our interactions with others. He then goes on to speak of forgiveness as the oil which brings healing and wholeness to those relationships and that God is the source of that oil. It is only as we become aware of the possibility of forgiveness, as we experience its power in our own lives, then we can begin to offer it to others.

The challenge of forgiveness is that we find it so difficult to forgive the debt. No wonder. To forgive the debt is to be willing to pay the price oneself for the sin of the other. To forgive someone for slander is to be willing to dismiss the embarrassment it caused for the sake of the other. To forgive someone for a wound inflicted is to accept the price of the pain. To forgive someone for stealing is to take on the responsibility of holding the other accountable for the pain they caused while being open to hearing the emptiness that brought the stealing about. The price of forgiveness is high. We believe God was willing to pay a very great price that we might enjoy the liberation that God offers to us. We are invited to bear some hurt that others might know the liberation God offers to them as well. But this forgiveness comes as a gift. We are unable to pay it on our own. There are infinite opportunities for us to practice forgiveness, the more we do it the better we become at it. The more we resist, the more resentment and the desire for revenge takes hold of us. That this prayer ties in our being forgiven with our willingness to forgive reminds us that our inability to forgive someone else for what he or she has done, robs us of the ability to be compassionate towards ourselves and instead curses us to the same judgment we hold towards the other.

I invite you this week to focus on this petition, to discern who you need to forgive and the work you need to undertake that might bring the healing oil to yourself, to your relationships, and to the others who might be transformed forever through the forgiveness that you are empowered to offer to them. Go give mercy, that you might receive it more than you can imagine.

Session Suspends Church Activities Until Sunday, May 10th.

In light of the continued spread of the Corona Virus and an Advisory Statement from Presbytery Council, the session has made the decision to suspend all church activities until May 10th. We will, of course, keep you advised of any changes we might make on this policy. The church is also pursuing financial support that is being offered through the presbytery.

Combined Sunday Morning Worship on YouTube Continues

Our combined worship service with First and Second Presbyterian Churches continues this Sunday at 10:30 am. **Go to YouTube and search for First Presbyterian Church Saginaw.** This week Brant will be leading some of the liturgy, while Rev. Ted McCullough will be offering the sermon. Our organist, Andrew Glynn will again be contributing music to the service.

As part of this service, please dedicate yourselves to God's work as you would normally do while we are together by making your regular offering to the church. Presently Mari is working to add an online donation opportunity to our website, but until it happens, please take this time to either write your check to the church or mail it in, or use the Bill Pay option at your bank. Mari and Lori are picking up the mail and processing the checks that are sent in. Please keep in mind any ministries to which you provide regular financial support that they might be sustained in this time where there might be reduced giving.

Combined Maundy Thursday Service on YouTube, Thursday, April 9th, 7 pm

This Thursday is Maundy Thursday, the day when we commemorate the Last Supper at which Jesus gives us a new commandment (Maundum in Latin), "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. We will again be combining our service with First and Second Presbyterian Churches on First Presbyterian's YouTube channel with a live stream service that will begin at 7pm.

The denomination, recognizing the unusual situation we are in, has authorized sessions to permit the celebration of the Lord's Supper online, and our session has done so. If you choose to participate in this celebration of the Lord's Supper during this service, please have your own bread and juice/wine prepared in advance. Do not fret if you don't have the exact elements you would normally use. We believe that through any form of bread and wine or juice, the Holy Spirit is at work, sealing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ on your heart. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to call Brant before Thursday. It may add to your experience if you and your family gather together around a table prepared for this in the ways that you see fit. Along with the bread and cup, you might want to have a candle to represent the presence of the Holy Spirit, and a small bowl of water to remind you of your baptism; perhaps a small cross and a depiction of an event from Holy Week. Work to make your space a sacred space, one in which you demonstrate your longing for God's presence in your lives.

Weekly Zoom Beatitudes Bible Studies, Wednesdays at 7 pm

Our weekly studies on the Beatitudes continue via our Zoom account on Wednesday evenings at 7 pm. This week, on April 8th, we will be exploring the beatitude, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."*

All members who have given their email addresses to the office are sent an invitation to participate on your laptop, tablet, or smart phone. You will need to download the Zoom app, and then use the information provided in the email to join the online meeting. Though video is not needed to participate, we do love to see your smiling face as well as hear your voice. If you are having issues joining the meeting, please let the church office know so that we might be able to guide you through the necessary steps.

Census 2020 Letters Have Arrived

By now most homes should have received their census letter giving the password for logging on to the Census site. If you need some guidance with this, please give the church a call, and we will help you work through it.



Prayer Against the Coronavirus

Lord, please watch over our friends, families, neighbors, and all of Your children throughout the world. We ask you to keep them safe from the devastating effects of the Coronavirus (Covid-19). We lift up everyone who has been exposed to the virus and especially those who have been diagnosed as positive or are presumed positive. Continue to watch over them and all of us as we continue through these uncertain times.

JOYS AND CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH

PRAYERS FOR HEALING: Kitty Blehm's sister, Rosemary Moss, Pat Denno's son, Mike, who has pneumonia, Kathy Loviska's nephew, Bill Luongo, who has tested positive for the Coronavirus and is hospitalized at Hurley Hospital in Flint. Lila Neumeyer, undergoing rehabilitation at Wellspring in Frankenmuth

JOYS TO SHARE: For the combined worship services made possible for us at First Presbyterian Church during this time of quarantine.

PRAYERS FOR COMFORT: The family of Lynne Groom for the loss of her mother, Carol Reinke, who recently passed away. Let us also continue to lift up the members of our community and world who risk their health and the health of their families to ensure that we are safe and cared for, that they might be strengthened and protected.

OPEN DOOR PRAYERS: All our neighbors at Bavarian Comfort Care, Edgewood Assisted Living Center, Health Source, New Hope Valley Independent, St. Francis Home, Swanhaven Manor, Wellspring Assisted Living, Wellspring Independent Living, or In Hospital or Private Homes especially for Helen Reynolds who has moved to Assisted Living and misses the socialization.



Merciful God, your healing power is everywhere about us. Strengthen those who work among the sick; give them courage and confidence in all they do. Encourage them when their efforts seem futile or when death prevails. Increase their trust in your power even to overcome death and pain and crying. May they be thankful for every sign of health you give, and humble before the mystery of your healing grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.