

BETHEL MURDOCH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
9602 Murdoch-Goshen Road, Loveland, OH 45140
October 10, 2021, 10:30 a.m.
Celebrating 207 years of Faithful Service to Our God
The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

We Enter Into God's Presence

WELCOME

L: This is the day that the Lord has made.

P: Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

THE PEACE

L: Since God has forgiven us in Christ, let us forgive one another.
The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

P: And also with you.

“SURELY THE PRESENCE”

Surely the presence of the LORD is in this place.

I can feel His mighty power and His grace.

I can hear the brush of angel's wings, I see glory on each face.

Surely the presence of the LORD is in this place.

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: God says: I will put my laws in their minds,

P: and write them on their hearts,

L: and I will be their God,

P: and they shall be my people.

OPENING PRAYER

Merciful God, in Jesus Christ you do not call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Draw us away from the easy road that leads to destruction, and guide us into paths that lead to life abundant, that in seeking your truth, and obeying your will, we may know the joy of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

HYMN: B- 293 “This Is My Father's World”

1 This is my Father's world, And to my listening ears All
nature sings, and round me rings The music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought Of
rocks and trees, of skies and seas; His hand the wonders wrought.

2 This is my Father's world, O let me ne'er forget That
though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world: The battle is not done;
Jesus who died shall be satisfied, And earth and heaven be one.

CALL TO CONFESSION:

Remember that our Lord Jesus can sympathize with us in our weaknesses, since in every respect he was tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with boldness approach the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Let us confess our sin before God and one another as we pray together saying,

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Eternal God, our judge and redeemer, we confess that we have tried to hide from you, for we have done wrong. We have lived for ourselves, and apart from you. We have turned from our neighbors, and refused to bear the burdens of others. We have ignored the pain of the world, and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed. In your great mercy forgive our sins and free us from selfishness, that we may choose your will and obey your commandments; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

SILENT PRAYER OF CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

L: Hear the good news! The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might be dead to sin and alive to all that is good. I declare to you in the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

P: Thanks be to God! Amen.

***RESPONSE: "Gloria Patri"**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen, Amen.

We Hear God's Word

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: Genesis 45:1-7, 12-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!" ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

¹² "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly."

¹⁴ Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

PSALM:Psalm 62:5-12

⁵ Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.

⁶ Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

⁷ My salvation and my honor depend on God^[a];
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

⁸ Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

⁹ Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.
If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.

¹⁰ Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen goods;
though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.

¹¹ One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:
“Power belongs to you, God,
¹² and with you, Lord, is unfailing love”;
and, “You reward everyone
according to what they have done.”

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 18:21-35

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

²² Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹ “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

³⁰ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had

happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.’ ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

MESSAGE: *The Debt Collector* Elder Mike Schepers

As many times as I have read or heard this parable of our Lord commonly entitled “The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant,” I have always felt confident that I fully understood all that Jesus is trying to teach us in this dramatic story. It seems obvious that this is a story about God, represented as a king, who demands from his servant, that’s you and me, the payment of an astronomical debt—about \$10 million in the parable—that represents the impossible debt we owe God for our sins. The servant wants to pay the debt and begs for more time. Instead, the king forgives the debt, which represents God’s grace and mercy towards us through the forgiveness of our sins.

Sadly, the servant leaves the king’s palace and demands payment of a small debt of about \$20 from a coworker. When the coworker asks for more time to pay his debt, the servant refuses to forgive him and has him tossed into debtor’s prison. When the king hears word of this cruel act, he summons the servant back to the palace and declares that for this heartless behavior, the debt forgiveness the king granted to the servant is revoked and the servant himself is sent away to prison until he pays his \$10 million debt in full. The meaning of the story is obvious: Since we have been forgiven much, we are expected to forgive others.

But like all parables Jesus taught us, there are deeper truths to be found if one scratches below the surface of the story just a bit. I was given deeper insight into this parable after recently reading a book entitled *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, by David Seamands, a pastor and professional

counselor. Let's take a deeper look at this parable through the eyes of a Christian psychologist.

The first thing to note is the servant's plea for more time to pay his debt to the king. Now, wanting to pay your debts is an honorable thing, right? Of course it is, unless your debt is \$10 million and you earn only about \$1 per day. The insistence on paying such an impossible debt reveals this servant to be a person filled with incredible pride and arrogance—something I had not recognized before. In his pride, he asks for the wrong thing. He asks for more time so that he can save himself when he should have asked for forgiveness of the debt. He wants to earn his salvation. Lovingly, the king does not grant his request, but gives him what he truly needs, which is far more than he asked for--full, unconditional forgiveness.

One thing that has always puzzled me about this parable, however, is why the servant did what he did next. I recognize his ungratefulness, his unmerciful attitude that Jesus is clearly warning us against, but why did he do something so radical as to assault the first person he saw who owed him some money and grab him by the neck? I have read that in the original Greek text, the word used conveys that the servant had his coworker in a death grip. This was no rude act of grabbing someone by the collar. This servant was so driven to collect his \$20 he was ready to kill his friend for it. Why? The answer, I believe, is found in the servant's pride. He was so intent on paying his debt to the king himself and earning his salvation that he never heard the king when the king said the debt is forgiven. The servant only heard that he did not have to pay the debt TODAY. He did not comprehend the fullness of the grace he had been given and did not receive the gift fully into his heart and soul.

The tragic truth is that those who do not fully understand, accept, and receive the depth of God's amazing forgiveness into the depths of their heart and soul are themselves incapable of forgiving others. According to Rev. Dr. Seamands, it is his belief that the failure to forgive yourself and failure to forgive others--which are both tied together like a vicious circle--leads to a host of emotional problems including guilt, resentment, and anxiety which leads to stress and conflict in our relationships with others. You see, the servant in the parable could not forgive himself. He still felt he had to pay the king back. This created such anxiety and stress in his life that he lashed out against a friend and coworker in a most outrageous way. Lack of forgiveness ruins relationships.

One other thing that has always puzzled me about this parable is the king's reaction to his proud and unmerciful servant. The king revoked his debt forgiveness. Did I read that correctly? Are there things we can do in our pride and resulting conflicts with others that might cause God to revoke our salvation? Absolutely not. The prison that Jesus speaks of in this parable is not Hell, but the prison of our own making in this life when we do not forgive others.

Isn't it amazing how we are all designed to be debt collectors? We all have such a natural tendency to keep an account of what we think we owe to God and others, and especially what others owe to us. We talk about how so-and-so owes us an apology; we talk about how so-and-so will pay for what they did to me. Such thinking leads us into a debtor's prison where we spend our time trying to pay and collect debts and all the stress, anxiety, and conflict that comes with it. Jesus calls us to abandon this way of living. He calls us to soak in his forgiveness, enjoy the depths of it, the fullness of it--and extend the same joy and grace to others. No matter how great or small the debt we think others may owe us, it's only worth \$20 compared the \$10 million we have been forgiven.

We all say we are forgiven by grace alone. We all know in our heads that our salvation is undeserved. But do we truly know in the depths of our hearts and souls that our salvation cannot be earned or paid for? Do you still think you are indebted to God for something? Are you holding a grudge against anyone? Are you and I still employed as debt collectors? It's so easy to do. But we were originally designed to be gracious and forgiving--it's the only way to stay out of the debtor's prison of resentment and broken relationships. Amen.

We Respond with Thanksgiving

HYMN:R- 197“Grace Greater Than Our Sin”

1 Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt! Yonder on Calvary's mount out-poured, There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Refrain:

Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin!

2 Sin and despair, like the sea-waves cold, Threaten the soul with infinite loss; Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold, Points to the Refuge, the mighty Cross. [Refrain]

3 Dark is the stain that we can not hide, What can avail to wash it away? Look! there is flowing a crimson tide; Whiter than snow you may be today. [Refrain]

4 Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, Freely bestowed on all who believe; You that are longing to see His face, Will you this moment His grace receive? [Refrain]

AFFIRMATION OF 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 again 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 Apostles' Creed-Ecumenical)*

OFFERING (To our online friends: Please remember to mail your offering to Bethel Murdoch Presbyterian Church, 9602 Murdoch Goshen Road, Loveland, Ohio 45140 or use the Give button on our website)

JOYS & CONCERNS OF THE CONGREGATION – (Please send your joys and concerns to the church email and we will publish them in the weekly ENews)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy God, in Jesus Christ you taught us to pray to you in his name. Guide us by your Holy Spirit, that our prayers for others may serve your will and show your steadfast love.

God our creator, you made all things in your wisdom, and in your love you save us. We pray for the whole creation. Overthrow evil powers, right what is wrong, feed and satisfy those who thirst for justice, so that all your

children may freely enjoy the earth you have made, and joyfully sing your praises.

Eternal God, you sent us a Savior, Christ Jesus, to break down the walls of hostility that divide us. Send peace on earth, and put down greed, pride, and anger, which turn nation against nation and race against race. Speed the day when wars will end and the whole world accepts your rule.

Merciful God, you bear the pain of the world. Look with compassion on all those who are sick mentally, emotionally or physically. Cheer them by your presence and your Word, and bring them healing as a sign of your grace.

Have mercy on those who are facing financial difficulties or loss of jobs and homes. God of comfort, stand with those who sorrow that they may be sure that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, shall separate them from your love.

Mighty God, whose Word we trust, whose Spirit enables us to pray: Accept our requests and further those which will bring about your purpose for the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray the prayer he taught us as we say together,

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

We are Sent Out to Love and Serve

HYMN:R-184 "Not What These Hands Have Done"

1 Not what these hands have done Can save my guilty soul;
Not what my toiling flesh has borne Can make my spirit whole.

2 Not what I feel or do Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears Can bear my awful load.

3 Thy work alone, O Christ, Can ease this weight of sin;

Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, Can give me peace within.

4 Thy love to me, O God, Not mine, O Lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest, And set my spirit free.

5 Thy grace alone, O God, To me can pardon speak;
Thy power alone, O Son of God, Can this sore bondage break.

6 I bless the Christ of God; I rest on love divine;
And With unfaltering lip and heart, I call this Savior mine. Amen

Charge and Benediction

Go out into the world in peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.
The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord be kind and gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

Choral Amen

Postlude