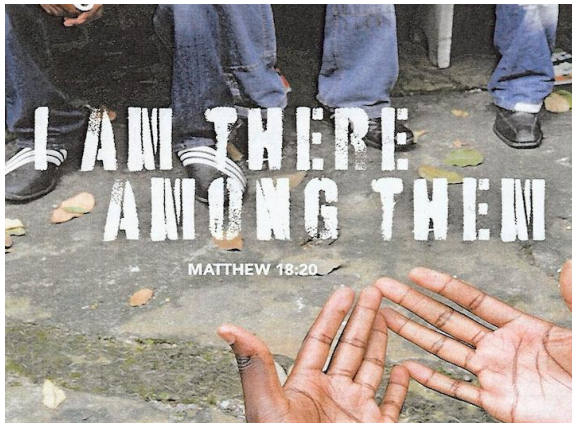


**Sunday, September 6, 2020**  
**Pentecost 14**  
**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**Somers Point, NJ 08244**  
**Interim Pastor: Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf**  
**“A Equipping Believers as Faithful Disciples of Jesus Christ”**



"Nothing is more common than relationships. Nothing is more perplexing than relationships. Nothing is more yearned for than relationships. Nothing brings more pain than relationships. Nothing brings more joy than relationships." These statements were boxed in an issue of *Seasons*, a periodic newsletter about growth and change, which Jesus teaches the disciples in Matthew's Gospel about reconciliation in relationships. The article states the supposed

"cure" for troubled relationships is communication. But there is more than one kind of communication. I have here Martin Luther's prayer "Hear my complaint." Let us pray: My Lord Jesus Christ, my neighbor has injured me, hurt my honor by talking about me, and interfered with my rights. I cannot tolerate this, and I wish to avoid any contact. O God, hear my complaint. I would gladly feel fondly toward my neighbor, but I cannot. How totally cold and insensible I am. O Lord, I am helpless and forsaken. If you change me, I will be sincere. O dear God, change me by your grace, or I must remain as I am. Amen

I remember my Grandpa Leo's story in studying for the ministry. In a class he did not know the answer the instructor asked, and the instructor embarrassed him front of his peers. Afterwards, Grandpa approached the instructor saying he decided not to pursue the ministry and would leave the school. Immediately the instructor apologized and encouraged him to stay on. "No, Grandpa said, if I cannot handle this in a classroom, I am certain I cannot handle it in a church."

I kept this thought shared at a pastors' study meeting, "From Kissing Fish, This is distressingly true, I fear come Grace for a change of heart. Before you speak let your words pass thru three gates: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind? "I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least." Dorothy Day

The Lutheran Handbook is a gem. Under everyday stuff is "how to forgive someone." Page 101. "Forgiving is one of the most difficult disciplines of faith, since it seems to cost you something additional

when you've already been wronged." Swallowing your pride and seeking a greater good; however, can yield great healing and growth.

- 1) Acknowledge that God forgives you. When you realize that God has already shown forgiveness and continues to forgive sinners like you, it's easier to forgive someone else.
- 2) Consult scripture. The Lord's Prayer taught by Jesus to his disciples who were hungry to become like he was (Matthew 6:9-15).
- 3) Seek the person out whenever possible. Consciously decide to deliver your forgiveness in person. If by telephone talk to the pastor prior to that action.
- 4). Say "I forgive you" out loud. Speaking the words enacts a physical chain reaction that can create healing for both speaker and hearer. Jesus used these words to heal a paralyzed man from across the room.
- 5). Pray for the power to forgive. To err is human to forgive is divine. Yes church! Praying for this is always good, whether a forgiveness situation is at hand or not. Be aware when someone sins against you personally, forgiving them does NOT depend upon them feeling sorry (showing contrition) or asking for your forgiveness. You may have to struggle; however, to forgive them without their consent or participation.

Early in my ministry at St. David's, I studied the members directory to a fault. The previous pastor noted spouses who were members, and those not with a parenthesis around their name. At the annual congregational meeting, a vote was needed. I noticed the wife of a member voting. I told her she could not vote since she was not a member. This did not go well. The husband was angry, and she was embarrassed. I apologized. Later in the week I went again to apologize. She understood. The healing would take time.

In *Life Together*, a discussion of Christian Fellowship, Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "We thank God for giving us brethren who live by His call, by His forgiveness, and His promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us, we rather thank God for what God does give us daily. And is not what has been given us enough, brothers (and sisters) who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of His Grace? Is the Divine gift of Christian fellowship anything less than this any day, even the most difficult and distressing day? Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother (and sister) still a brother (and sister) with whom I too, stand under the word of Christ. Will not his (or her) sin a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ...it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one word and deed, which really binds us together - forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ."

Another Martin Luther prayer "Help me to Forgive." Dear God, I have been wronged. Why? I do not deserve it of this person. But I must remember and understand who I am to you. There is a long complaint against me, proving that I am ten times worse and have sinned a thousand times more against you than my neighbor has against me. Therefore, I must agree with your wish by sincerely praying: O Lord, forgive, and I will also forgive. Amen.