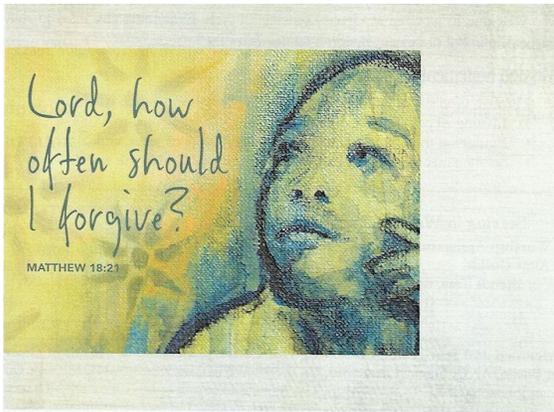


Sunday, September 13, 2020
Pentecost 15
Grace Lutheran Church
Somers Point, NJ 08244
Interim Pastor: Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf
“Jesus' Challenge”



Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune, physical, coordination, and timing games, and maybe even *The Bachelor* are games that challenge our capability. Peter asked the question is seven times adequate to forgive? Jesus' challenge to Peter and all who follow Jesus: seventy-seven times. ...To forgive is divine. We need God's help to forgive without limits.

In *Credo* William Sloan Coffin writes, "I don't know why sin is such a bad word. Obviously we're sinners, the more so the more we try to deny it. But that's not the issue. At issue is whether there is more mercy in God than sin in us. And according to Paul, just as love is stronger than death, so forgiveness is stronger than sin. So forgiveness is stronger than sin. Jesus' challenge seventy-seven to Peter and us underscores the strength of love and forgiveness we have in Jesus to do this.

From *The Word in Season*, Elizabeth Jeager, Pastor of St. Luke Lutheran Church, mom of three children and author of three children's books, shares her thoughts..."When I think about forgiveness I am reminded of the day in 2015 when twelve people were shot (three survived) during a Bible study at Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, by a young man who had come and joined them. Only two days after losing their loved ones, several of the victims' family members were able to forgive the shooter. There were those who marveled at how these relatives were able to forgive such a brutal crime so quickly. The shooter intentionally left Polly Sheppard alive "to tell the story." In an interview on the Today Show (NBC, September 20, 2018, Polly shared these wise words: "Forgiveness is like you think you're letting someone else off the hook, but you're actually letting yourself off the hook because if you keep it, there's no healing with hatred. You have to love each other." Of course, forgiveness is a hard process. "We need to ask God daily to help us forgive."

I heard this short prayer in dealing with resentments "God bless (name of the person you resent, or place, or thing) change me." I would put a lot of emphasis on God bless so and so with little thought on "change me." Practice, practice, practice I realized God will take care of so and so I need to change. My attitude needed to change with God's help toward others and places and things.

A prominent clergyman who wrote an article on resentment said, "If you have a resentment you want to be free of, if you will pray for the person, or the thing that you resent, you will be free. If you will ask in prayer for everything you want for yourself to be given to them, you will be free. Ask for their health, their prosperity, their happiness, and you will be free, even when you don't really want it for them and your prayers are only words and you don't mean it, go ahead and do it anyway. Do it everyday for two weeks and you will find you have come to mean it and to want it for them and you will realize that where you used to feel bitterness and resentment and hatred you now feel compassionate understanding and love. It works. Sometimes you have to ask first for the willingness. But it too always comes." Jesus give us willingness and strength to persist in prayer.

From *Too Soon Old Too Late Smart*, Gordon Livingston wrote in his last chapter, "Coming to Terms with our past is inevitable, a process of forgiveness, of letting go, the simplest and most difficult of all human endeavors. It is simultaneously an act of will and of surrender. And it often seems impossible until the moment you do it."

As Followers of Christ we are not in a position to judge if another is worthy of forgiveness, we are simply to grant it. That is Jesus' challenge to us and Jesus will help us do it. Amen.