**All Church Worship Brainstorming Summary**

**“Forgiveness”**

Monday, March 4, 2024

April 7-28, 2024 (4 weeks)

**Members present:** Bob Keim, Marie Kordecki, Diane Thompson, Barb Gripton, Dave Booth, Jean Kelly, Betty Kinney, Lynne Richmond, Jim Post, Karen Post, Kathy Luckett, Paul Powers, Pastor Mary, Karen Booth; Ken Luckett via email

BD15034_

*“The worship we hope to develop will be rooted in Scripture, centered on Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It will be relevant to local and emerging culture, while addressing the needs of believers and unbelievers alike. Above all, it will intentionally engage people physically, emotionally, intellectually, and soulfully.”*

**Felt needs:** What physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual need are we addressing in

this service so that worship is engaging and a means of making disciples? What question

needs to be posed/answered so that we are making disciples?

**Series synopsis:** If you ask children what they want to be when they grow up, they are

unlikely to say, “angry, bitter, and unforgiving.” We see the physical, emotional, and

spiritual effects of unforgiveness in ourselves and those around us. Forgiveness doesn’t

come naturally. How can we learn to ask for and receive forgiveness?

**2024 theme connection:** Many people treated Jesus poorly. He had many reasons to

hold a grudge, but he chose to forgive. Following Jesus means learning how to ask for

and receive forgiveness. Consider the second and third verses of our theme song, “The

Jesus Way” by Phil Wickham:

If you curse me, then I will bless you

If you hurt me, I will forgive

And if you hate me, then I will love you

I choose the Jesus way

If you strike me, I will embrace you

And if you chain me, I'll sing His praise

And if you kill me, my home is heaven

For I choose the Jesus way

**2024 Theme:**  Following the Jesus Way

**Inspiration:** [*The Jesus Way*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARSGgC9iQb0) by Phil Wickham

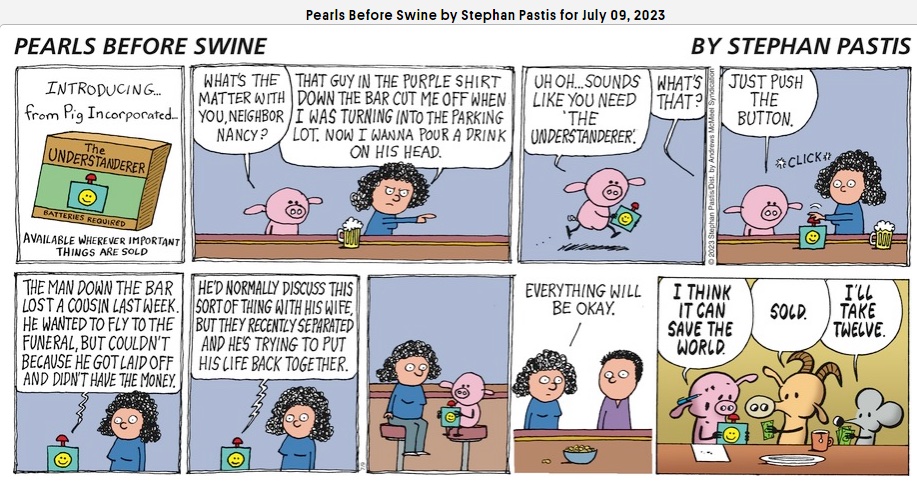
**Related songs:** *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*

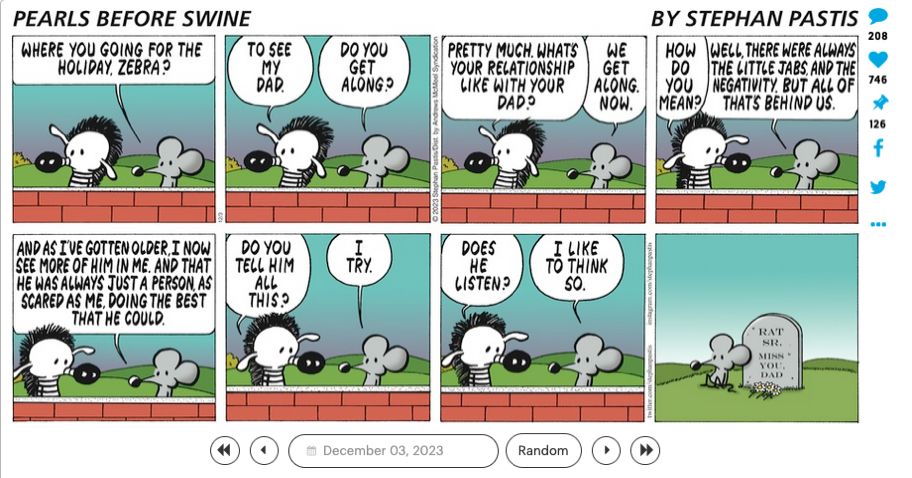
**Key verse:** John 13: 34 – A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

**Social Justice Issue for April 2024:** Creation Care

**Noisy offering for April 2024:** Hope Project

**NOTE:** General Conference is April 23-May 3 in Charlotte, NC.

**Points to consider:**

* Learn to ask for and receive forgiveness?
* Family dynamics – chaos, lack of positive modeling, character formation
* 8 steps to healing
* Laying the groundwork so it is easier to forgive
* Not excusing bad behavior
* Pearls Before Swine cartoons, 7-9-23 and 12-3-23
* Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing.

**Resources:**

* *Forgiveness: Finding Peace Through Letting Go* by Adam, Hamilton
* “What We Can Learn from Ted Lasso” by Chase Crickenberger. Excerpt: The proverbial strings began to connect for me about halfway through the series finale when Roy Kent, my personal favorite, finally asked to join the inner sanctum we’d come to know as “The Diamond Dogs.” After a curse-filled rant about wanting to be a different person, he posed a simple question: “Can a person change?” Assistant Coach Beard said (slightly paraphrasing here), “There are perfect movies, perfect foods, perfect trees … but perfection in people is not possible.” Then Leslie, the docile assistant to the club owner, responded, “The best you can do is to keep asking for help and accepting it when you can. And if you keep on doing that, you’ll always be moving toward ‘better.’”
* [30+ Bible Verses about Forgiveness](https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/forgiveness-bible-verses/) (biblestudytools.com)
* [10 Things the Bible Says about Forgiveness](https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-does-the-bible-say-about-forgiveness.html) (crosswalk.com)
* [30 Forgiveness Quotes to Help You Let Go of the Past](https://www.oprahdaily.com/life/relationships-love/g29995262/forgiveness-quotes/?slide=8)
* “We Can All Learn from Travis Hunter” by Mike Kerrigan
* “How to Deal with Bitterness and Resentment” by Anne Peterson, Christianity Today, 2011
* UM website:
  + <https://www.umc.org/en/content/privilege-confession-and-forgiveness>
  + <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-the-methodist-belief-about-forgiveness-of-sin>
  + <https://www.umc.org/en/content/before-god-and-one-another-united-methodists-and-confession>
  + <https://www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-beliefs-forgiveness>
  + <https://www.umc.org/en/content/why-those-who-are-forgiven-should-be-forgiving>
  + “Chuck Knows Church - Confession of Sins.” Length: 3:35. Cost: Free. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0rMlRMwHfw>
  + <https://www.umc.org/en/content/repentance-forgivness-and-reconciliation>
  + “A Different Set of Rules: Forgiveness” Length: 3:47. Cost: Free.

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/a-different-set-of-rulesforgiveness?fbclid=IwAR3huqHDt3nbxi7zONwnQBHghBz2ZHsyDQ3hZyDmQWAE2DmtpP1t5w8iFtw>

* [My Father’s Violin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyhWDaS8YYE) (2022) Through their shared grief and connection to music, an orphaned girl bonds with her emotionally aloof, successful violinist uncle and he learns more about his brother, his life of sacrifice, and forgiveness.
* [Excerpt](https://lakeharborumc.org/2023/06/2023-worship-planning-retreat/) from *The Lord of the Rings*

It’s like in the great stores, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn’t want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened?

But in the end, it’s only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those where the stories that stayed with you. That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why.

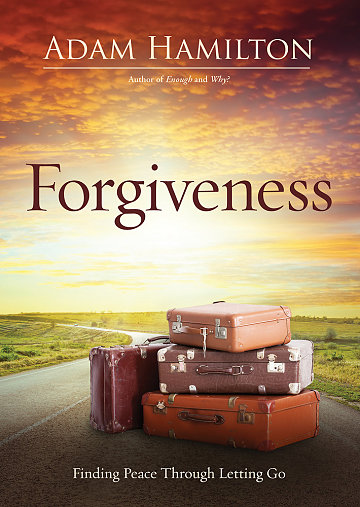
But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn’t. They kept going, because they were holding on to something.

That there is some good in this world, and it’s worth fighting for.

* Samwise Gamgee, The Lord of the Rings
* “Forgiveness in the Hands of God.” Most of us will never look into the eyes of someone who murdered our friends and family. But Hutu and Tutsi Rwandans are now reconciling years after one of the most devastating genocides in history. In this reconciliation we see the power of God's grace to bring repentance, transformation, and forgiveness. We also see the possibility of reconciliation in our own lives.
* [“Bitter Isn’t Better: Stop Holding Grudges.”](https://lakeharborumc.org/2019/06/june-2-2019-message-bitter-isnt-better-stop-holding-grudges/) Carole Koch and Brad Hilleary preached this message together on June 2, 2019. It is worth reading their message and revisiting some quotes about grudges.
* [“Forgiveness: Making Peace with the Past,”](https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/f/forgiveness-making-peace-with-past.html?utm_source=Christian%20Bible%20Studies%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=10531&utm_content=15404&utm_campaign=email) an eight-session bible study by Douglas Connelly. Topics:
  + Our Forgiving Father
  + Why We Need Forgiveness
  + Confession Our Sin
  + The Shout of a Forgiven Man
  + How We Forgive Others
  + When We Are Wounded
  + As We Forgive Other
  + Forgiving When We Don’t Feel Like It

Forgiveness discussions in healthcare and social science

* Mayo Clinic - <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>
* <https://www.southernliving.com/culture/forgiveness-quotes>
* <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/forgiveness-your-health-depends-on-it>
* <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/eight_keys_to_forgiveness>
* <https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/>
* Psychology Today - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/forgiveness>

**Visuals:**

* *Backpack* filled with pebbles and rocks of different sizes to show the burden of sin and unforgiveness (Hamilton).
* Baggage/luggage. **Related video (or** [**skit**](https://skitguys.com/scripts/the-baggage-skit)**):** [“Baggage.”](https://skitguys.com/videos/baggage-skit) Length: 10:12. Cost: $18.00. We’ve all got it and it’s really hard to let it go. When it feels like you’re dealt one blow after another and become weighed down with too much baggage, can you let go and let God take control?
* Words on the ledge: FORGIVENESS or FORGIVENESS IS HARD
* Suspend luggage from the ledge with words spilling out of it – hate, grudges, etc.
* *Chalkboard*– from a series, [“Erasable.”](https://churchstagedesignideas.com/the-blackboard/)
* *Flower petals (Ken):* Tape paper flower petals with words or phrases or scripture about forgiveness around the sanctuary and a large posterboard flowerpot onstage. As a few volunteers from the congregation to relocate a few flowers to the flowerpot every Sunday. By the end of the series, you have a beautiful blooming flowerpot.
* *Birds (Ken):* At times, we find ourselves giving forgiveness and at other times, receiving it. Have picture of birds that migrate which symbolize coming and going.

**Hands-on items:**

* Eraser
* 70x7 tattoos
* COFFEE (Christ Offers Forgiveness for Everyone Everywhere)
* Forgiveness stone (KEN): Take a stone and throw it in the lake to symbolize letting go of what’s stopping us from forgiving or pursuing forgiveness.

**Activities:**

* Dissolving paper – write notes for forgiveness on dissolvable paper, bring them forward, and drop them in water
* [Object lesson about forgiveness using baking soda and vinegar](https://meaningfulmama.com/character-building-object-lesson-about-forgiveness.html)
* *Forgiveness notes (Ken):* Offer the congregation the opportunity to write notes of forgiveness, either asking for or offering forgiveness. Drop them in a slotted box before worship, during the offering, or after worship. Have Pastor Mary pray over them each week in worship.

**Children’s Time:** Superhero Forgiveness (Ken) – Have a superhero show up every Sunday wearing a shirt with the letter, “F,” for forgiveness. Each week discuss one of the 4 R’s of forgiveness: responsibility, remorse, restoration, renewal

**Music:** Hymns under *Confession* and *Forgiveness* in UMH, *Repentance, Pardon and Assurance*

**Additional Scriptures:**

* Psalms **-** 32, 40, 103, 130
* Luke 23: 32-34 (Jesus offering forgiveness from the cross)
* Ephesians 4:25-5:2
* Colossians 3: 12-14
* I John 1: 8-10
* Romans 12: 17-21

**General discussion points:**

* Pastor Mary choose The Voice (translation) and The Message (paraphrase) so that we can hear the readings anew. The three parables are powerful. Where do we see ourselves in the parables? How does the answer change during our lives? She also chose the Lord’s Prayer. Jesus knew it isn’t easy to keep on forgiving.
* When a family is face with a serious illness, struggles with unforgiveness become more apparent.
* We need to offer some clear definitions. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing. Bob found it helpful to see a list of what forgiveness is and is not. Here is an example: Forgiveness:
  + Is your choice. It is not forgetting.
  + Is a decision to stop trying to control a person or a situation. It is not saying what happened was okay.
  + Is taking responsibility for your actions and making amends. It is not letting the person out of justice.
  + Is having healthy boundaries. It is not saying you will no longer be sad or wish it were different.
* Forgiveness:
  + Takes time and intentionality.
  + We’ll never be as good at forgiveness at God, but we can work at it.
  + Sometimes we are mad at God. How do we make peace with stuff we don’t understand?
  + Church: You might think that forgiveness is a given if you love Jesus, but it is still hard.
  + Is not just a church topic, everyone talks about. Medical providers recognize the connection between forgiveness and health.
* Unhelpful quip: *Forgive and forget*. It is okay to watch for repeated unjust or hurtful behavior.
* Was God forgiving before he sent Jesus?
* Movies
  + [“The Mission”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnXN-mRFoPI) (1986). On his way to Father Gabriel's (Jeremy Irons) mission, Rodrigo (Robert De Niro) hauls his armor and sword through the jungle as penance for his many sins. This is cited as one of the top Christian movies of all times. *Comment:* The scene where the next is cut, falls, and the community surrounds Mendoza (Robert DeNiro) is particularly powerful.
  + [“Dead Man Walking”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-tLJ-OXN9I) (1995). As death row inmate Matthew Poncelet (Sean Penn) nears his execution date, he calls upon Sister Helen Prejean (Susan Sarandon) to help him with one last appeal, maintaining that he is innocent of the murders of a young couple. Poncelet begins to form a bond with Prejean, and she visits both his family and the relatives of the victims, hoping to learn more about the case. As things begin to look bleak for Poncelet, Prejean does all that she can to comfort and console the hardened convict. *Comment:* Sister Prejean says he needs need to take responsibility for his actions.
* Would it be helpful to share stories of forgiveness during the spoken God moments? Bob shared a story about his college performance, teaching, and Christ-like principal.

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**April 7, 2024:** “Forgiveness: God’s Answer to Us”

2nd Sunday of Easter

**Scripture:**Luke 15: 1-2, 11-32 (VOICE)

**Narrator:** 15 Jesus became increasingly popular among *notorious* sinners—tax collectors and other social outcasts. 2The Pharisees and religious scholars noticed this.

**Pharisees and Religious Scholars:** This man welcomes immoral people and enjoys their company over a meal!

**Jesus** *(with another parable)***:** 11Once there was this man who had two sons. 12One day the younger son came to his father and said, “Father, eventually I’m going to inherit my share of your estate. Rather than waiting until you die, I want you to give me my share now.” And so the father *liquidated assets and* divided them. 13A few days passed and this younger son gathered all his wealth and set off on a journey to a distant land. Once there he wasted everything he owned on wild living. 14He was broke, a terrible famine struck that land, and he felt desperately hungry and in need. 15He got a job with one of the locals, who sent him into the fields to feed the pigs. 16The young man felt so miserably hungry that he wished he could eat the slop the pigs were eating. Nobody gave him anything.

17So he had this moment of self-reflection: “*What am I doing here?* Back home, my father’s hired servants have plenty of food. Why am I here starving to death? 18I’ll get up and return to my father, and I’ll say, ‘Father, I have done wrong—wrong against God and against you. 19I have forfeited any right to be treated like your son, but I’m wondering if you’d treat me as one of your hired servants?’” 20So he got up and returned to his father. The father looked off in the distance and saw the young man returning. He felt compassion for his son and ran out to him, enfolded him in an embrace, and kissed him.

21The son said, “Father, I have done a terrible wrong in God’s sight and in your sight too. I have forfeited any right to be treated as your son.”

22But the father turned to his servants and said, “Quick! Bring the best robe we have and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. 23Go get the fattest calf and butcher it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate 24 because my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and has been found.” So they had this huge party.

25 Now the man’s older son was still out in the fields working. He came home at the end of the day and heard music and dancing. 26He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. 27The servant said, “Your brother has returned, and your father has butchered the fattest calf to celebrate his safe return.”

28 The older brother got really angry and refused to come inside, so his father came out and pleaded with him to join the celebration.29But he argued back, “Listen, all these years I’ve worked hard for you. I’ve never disobeyed one of your orders. But how many times have you even given me a little goat to roast for a party with my friends? Not once! *This is not fair!* 30So this son of yours comes, this wasteful delinquent who has spent your hard-earned wealth on loose women, and what do you do? You butcher the fattest calf from our herd!”

31The father replied, “My son, you are always with me, and all I have is yours. 32Isn’t it right to join in the celebration and be happy? This is your brother we’re talking about. He was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found again!”

**Synopsis:** Jesus’ parable about the lost son (or the forgiving father) is powerful because it reminds us that God’s nature is to forgive, which challenges how we view ourselves and others.

**Felt need:** To remember that God is always willing to forgive

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion

**Media possibilities:**

* [“Welcome Home.”](https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/107928/welcome-home) Length: 1:59. Cost: Free. Web license: No. One of the great stories Jesus tells is of the prodigal son – who left on his own, but returned home to a loving father. This should be how first-time guests feel at your church. **Comments:** People coming from bad home situations could find it difficult. It looks too easy. On a related note: [Find Layla by Meg Elison](https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/49348194) is the perfect example of a horribly broken home life.
* [“Prodigal: A Father’s Love.”](https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/63948/prodigal-a-fathers-love) Length: 5:39. Cost: Free. Web license: No. Adapted from “What’s So Amazing About Grace?” (©1997) by Philip Yancy, Prodigal is a relatable telling of the well-known parable used by Jesus to show us who God is and how God loves. There is also an [extended version](https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/64806/prodigal-a-fathers-love-extended-version) (length: 10:06).
* [“Homecoming.”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/92473/homecoming) Length: 2:50. Cost: $25.00. Web license: Yes. The parable of the prodigal son is a portrait of the extravagant love of God. **Comments:** Good.
* [“The Prodigal: Abridged.”](https://skitguys.com/videos/the-prodigal-abridged) Length: 5:00. Cost: $18.00. Web license: Yes. The Skit Guys retell the story of the Prodigal Son. **Comments:** This is out top pick.

**Music:** #383 This Is a Day of New Beginnings; #3102 You Are My King (Amazing Love)

**Children’s Time:**

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* Luke 15 is in the middle of Jesus’ ministry. The parables of the lost sheep and coin immediately precede this parable.
* Prodigal means “wasteful.”
* This parable is known by many people outside of church. Why? The story appears in literature. It is relatable – we see ourselves in it, whether we are the kid that left or the one that stuck around. It is open-ended.
* Family drama: This is the stuff that soap operas, Netflix movies, and other high dramas are made of. Anyone from a large family knows the players and recognizes the resentments. We see sibling rivalry. We recognize the kids at school that act out (and get attention, even if it is the bad kind). Everyone in the story has real feelings.
* Younger son: Asking for his inheritance now (v. 12-13) is the equivalent of saying, “I wish you were dead, Dad.” He needs forgiveness and is scared he won’t get it.
* Older son: “It’s not fair.”
* The loving father (God): Did he give the older son his inheritance? The younger son’s apology (v. 21) doesn’t elicit any verbal response from the father; he just calls for a celebration. This tells us something about the nature of God. Family and community add another layer of complexity to the mix.
* What happened the day after the party? Was there a family “discussion”? Did the sons work together?
* Reestablishing trust: Once trust is broken, it has to be earned again. How does anyone know that the story won’t repeat itself ad infinitum?
* Community:
  + Pastor Mary’s experience at Cedar Springs with a family whose 19-year-old son was caught in a sex sting was heartbreaking. The parents had to navigate the mess. Pastor Mary and the psychologist were the only ones who could visit the son in jail. “He just got caught. I hope everyone understand that this could happen to anyone.”
  + In the past few months, 20/20 featured the story of Jeffrey Willis who was sentenced to life in prison for the abduction and murder of Heeringa, then 25-years-old. Her body has never been found. That show opened wounds for many people, including Willis’ brother who at one point considered legally changing his name so he and family would not be judged by his brother’s conviction.
  + It is said that members of Gen X crave authentic community. Real authentic communities are usually messy – maybe not what everyone has in mind.
* How does the church reflect the loving father, not the judgmental son?
* How does a loving father navigate the very human feelings of both sons?
* LHUMC’s welcoming statement is one of inclusivity and love.
* *To err is human; to forgive is divine.*
* Systemic theology is a *“discipline of Christian theology that formulates an orderly, rational, and coherent account of the doctrines of the Christian faith. It addresses issues such as what the Bible teaching about certain topics or what is true about God and His universe.”* Tuesday morning Bible study participants have had discussions about this. Question: How do we come back to church if we don’t feel worthy?

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**April 14, 2024:** “Forgiveness: Set Free”

3rd Sunday of Easter

**Scripture:**Luke 7: 36-50 (VOICE)

**Narrator:** 36-40Once a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to be a guest for a meal.

*Picture this:*

Just as Jesus enters the man’s home and takes His place at the table, a woman from the city—notorious as a woman of ill repute—follows Him in. She has heard that Jesus will be at the Pharisee’s home, so she comes in and approaches Him, carrying an alabaster flask of perfumed oil. Then she begins to cry, she kneels down so her tears fall on Jesus’ feet, and she starts wiping His feet with her own hair. Then she actually kisses His feet, and she pours the perfumed oil on them.

**Simon** *(thinking)***:** *Now I know this guy is a fraud.* If He were a real prophet, He would have known this woman is a sinner and He would never let her get near Him, much less touch Him . . . *or kiss Him*!

**Jesus** *(knowing what the Pharisee is thinking)***:** Simon, I want to tell you a story.

**Simon:** Tell me, Teacher.

**Jesus:** 41Two men owed a certain lender a lot of money. One owed 100 weeks’ wages, and the other owed 10 weeks’ wages. 42Both men defaulted on their loans, but the lender forgave them both. Here’s a question for you: which man will love the lender more?

**Simon:** 43Well, I guess it would be the one who was forgiven more.

**Jesus:** Good answer.

44-46Now Jesus turns around so He’s facing the woman, although He’s still speaking to Simon.

**Jesus:** Do you see this woman here? *It’s kind of funny.* I entered your home, and you didn’t provide a basin of water so I could wash the road dust from My feet. You didn’t give Me a customary kiss of greeting and welcome. You didn’t offer Me the common courtesy of providing oil to brighten My face. But this woman has wet My feet with her own tears and washed them with her own hair. She hasn’t stopped kissing My feet since I came in. And she has applied perfumed oil to My feet. 47This woman has been forgiven much, and she is showing much love. But the person who has shown little love shows how little forgiveness he has received.

48(to the woman) Your sins are forgiven.

**Simon and Friends** *(muttering among themselves)***:** 49Who does this guy think He is? He has the audacity to claim the authority to forgive sins?

**Jesus** *(to the woman)***:** 50Your faith has **liberated** you. Go in peace.

**Synopsis:** Jesus’ demonstration of forgiveness as a part of his ministry challenged the sensibilities of those closest to him. He is clear that forgiveness frees us to live in peace, but requires our willingness to turn to God in repentance.

**Felt need:** To know the freedom that forgiveness offers us - both when received and offered to others

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

* [“Mistakes of Our Past.”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/61466/mistakes-of-our-past) Length: 1:14. Cost: $6.99. Web license: No. Watch Julia explain how the mistakes from her past are head through the power of a godly community. **Comments:** WOW. Very powerful.
* [“The Forgiven.”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/32638/the-forgiven) Length: 2:29. Cost: $19.98. Web license: Yes. Forgiving is the last thing we want to do when we are hurt by someone. This video illustrates that Jesus came to change the system of forgiveness.
* ["Forgiven Much.”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/2939/forgiven-much) Length: 4:00. Cost: $18.00. Web license: No. Every year a small family-owned bank forgives the outstanding loans of two of their customers. Based on Luke 7: 41-47.
* [“The Parables of Two Debtors.”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/63656/the-parable-of-the-two-debtors) Length: 4:53. Cost: $12.00. Jesus tells a short parable about our penchant to lose perspective of our sins and the sins of others. In this video a pastor cannot see the similarities between his issues and his son’s issues. The grandfather, though lacking physical sight, can see clearly the parallels between his son and grandson.

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:**

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* The woman (she is not Mary Magdalene): Why would she follow Jesus in, given the risk? Did he know her? Had she been to the Pharisee’s house before for other reasons? She must have been quite gutsy, known of Jesus, or some of both. Kneeling is a posture of contrition and vulnerability. Washing his feet with her tears and hair is a very intimate act. It appears that she came, looking for forgiveness, something she couldn’t get from the Pharisees or at the temple. Once Jesus had forgiven her, how would she have supported herself in the future?
* An alabaster flask of perfumed oil would have been very expensive.
* No matter how much we’ve sinned, we can be forgiven. If the people “in charge” in the religious world won’t offer what is needed (forgiveness), there is no hope.
* Hospitality is expected in this culture in bible times. The Pharisee should have offered it and did not. The woman did. Jesus told this parable of two debtors to point out the Pharisee’s hypocrisy.
* Forgiveness looks different depending on our own experiences.
* “Welcoming All” doesn’t come with asterisks. Paul remembers ushering in another church where a homeless man was being asked to leave – a huge asterisk.
* Repentance (facing the issue and turning around 180° - not 360°) needs to come before forgiveness or human relationships suffer. Pastor Mary has heard more than one person say that the prayer of confession doesn’t apply to them. Her response is that it might not at that moment in time for you, but it matters to others not and might to you at another point in time.
* Humans weigh sins. Comparison is part of human DNA. God doesn’t work that way.
* Do we keep saying we forgive until we actually mean it? We should be honest and say it only if we mean it. Do we have to keep repeating it until we mean it? Forgiveness is for ourselves.
* What do we do if someone refuses to accept your forgiveness?
* Faith calls us to talk directly to the person who hurt us, not to everyone else. If that fails, then we ask someone else to be there. There is a right way to handle this. Do we feel like we can respond graciously if someone approaches us? Do we become defensive?
* When Betty has a nagging feeling that she has said the wrong thing, she goes to them or calls them directly.
* “Sorry” is overused in our American culture. “Excuse me” might be a good way to start.

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**April 21, 2024:** “Forgiveness: Beyond the Count”

4th Sunday of Easter

### **Scripture:**Matthew 18: 21-35 (MSG) **A Story About Forgiveness**

21At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, “Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?”

22Jesus replied, “Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.

23-25“The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn’t pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.

26-27“The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.

28“The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay up. Now!’

29-31“The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ But he wouldn’t do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.

32-35“The king summoned the man and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn’t you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?’ The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that’s exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn’t forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy.”

**Synopsis:** We want forgiveness to be an easy process - even being able to keep track of it and get it right. But forgiveness is messy and hard - and calls us to remember God’s willingness to forgive us so that we might be more forgiving.

**Felt need:** To be honest about our tendency to be unforgiving and our need to forgive others

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:** 70x7 tattoos

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

* [“A Clean Slate.”](https://skitguys.com/videos/a-clean-slate) Length: 2:03. Cost: $18.00. Web license: Yes. We all have things we wish we could erase. Thankfully, God redeems our past mistakes, our bad choices, and our failures. He offers us a clean slate. **Comments:** If only… We’ve all said it. Could we use this at Children’s Time? Related song by Tenth Avenue North: [“You Are More”](https://www.google.com/search?q=tenth+avenue+north+you+are+more+lyrics&newwindow=1&sca_esv=21cc0bb16a8a9ef4&biw=1313&bih=1169&ei=WbvoZYuJFK2optQP04K_6Ag&ved=0ahUKEwjLmd-lp-CEAxUtlIkEHVPBD40Q4dUDCBA&uact=5&oq=tenth+avenue+north+you+are+more+lyrics&gs_lp=_BA&sclient=gws-wiz-serp) You are more than the choices that you’ve made. You are more than the sum of your past mistakes. You are more than the problem you create, you’ve been remade….
* [“The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/63658/the-parable-of-the-unmerciful-servant) Length: 3:52. Cost: $12.00. Web license: No. We all desire to be treated mercifully. Yet, we’re often merciless when put in a position to show it to others. At is its very core about a middle-aged yuppie who is in deep water financially and has to get a prized garden gnome back from his neighbor in order to help pay his debts.

**Music:** #389 Freely, Freely; #560 Help Us Accept Each Other

**Children’s Time:**

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* Today’s parable is preceded by a passage on living in community and conflict resolution. Go directly to the one who wronged you. Don’t tell everyone else.
* Peter must have felt pretty good in offering to forgive someone seven (a complete number) times as the expected number was three.
* Our tendency is to withhold forgiveness for others – and probably for ourselves too.
* We might find it easier to exploit others’ weaknesses knowing our own.
* Definitions are important: Mercy is not getting the punishment we deserve. Grace is unmerited love.
* We want forgiveness to be easy, but it takes time and effort on our part. How others respond is up to them.
* Will we carry regret to the grave? What have we left unsaid? See p. 2, Pearls Before Swine cartoon from December 3, 2023.
* Parables put us in a “gotcha” situation. If we are like the servant, have we really received forgiveness? We can’t understand God’s forgiveness until we can extend it to others.
* There is a parallel between physically exercising to feel better and practicing forgiveness to feel better spiritually.

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**April 28, 2024:** “Forgiveness: A Constant Commitment”

5th Sunday of Easter

**Scripture:**Matthew 6: 9-15 (MSG)

With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven,  
Reveal who you are.  
Set the world right;  
Do what’s best—  
    as above, so below.  
Keep us alive with three square meals.  
**Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.**Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.  
You’re in charge!  
You can do anything you want!  
You’re ablaze in beauty!  
    Yes. Yes. Yes.

14-15“In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can’t get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God’s part.

**Synopsis:** The prayer Jesus teaches (and invites us to pray) shows that forgiveness requires our constant commitment.

**Felt need:** To understand that forgiveness requires constant prayer and attention

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:** [“Forgive Us.”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/110034/forgive-us) Length: 1:12. Cost: $12.00. Web license: Yes. We all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. We all need to be forgiven.

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:**

**Social media:**

**Related articles:**

**Discussion points:**

* There is always something that we can do to be more forgiving. We have to accept and extend forgives to understand it.
* How do we behave after we forgive or have been forgiven? Sometimes we have to set boundaries, so reconciliation isn’t possible. We shouldn’t retaliate or seek revenge. When we hold onto baggage, who is punished? Us.
* To bring about the Kingdom of God is to understand the nature of forgiveness. We are called to forgive.
* What about murder? Is forgiveness a step in the grief process? It is worth trying.
* Repentance: Is forgiveness warranted without it? Do we forgive even when they are not sorry? How do we get past asking for forgiveness and getting no response. Understand the role of timing.
* Daryl Davis, a black musician, befriended members of the KKK and other white supremacists in search of the answer to his questions: “How can you hate me if you don’t even know me.” Watch: [Accidental Courtesy: Daryl Davis, Race & America](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7fh5J_mo5E) trailer. His reconciliation efforts have taken a good deal of time, effort, and risk.

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**May 5, 2024:** 6th Sunday of Easter, Children’s Sunday

**Scripture:**Mark 10: 13-16 (MSG)

The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: “Don’t push these children away. Don’t ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom. Mark this: Unless you accept God’s kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you’ll never get in.” Then, gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them.

**Synopsis:**

**Felt need:** To celebrate ministry with young people in our community

**Visuals:** Bulletin cover drawn by kid/youth, Use art projects in sanctuary, PP presentation

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** acolytes, Holy Communion, Mission Team commissioning

**Celebrating Ministry in our Church and Community:**

* Reflections on Sunday School
* MNO - Thinking of You baby gifts
* Christian Education leaders
* Ross Park Readers and/or Reflection from Ross Park staff
* Scouting

**Media possibilities:**

* [“Kids Talk Forgiveness 2.”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/13865/kids-talk-forgiveness-2) Length: 0:42. Cost: $8.00. Web license: Probably not. In this segment kids explain why it is important for us to forgive others.

**Music:** Kids and youth offering music, *Jesus Loves Me* (UMH 191);

**Children’s time:** Scouting Sunday, thanks to Christian Ed leaders

**Social media:**

**Other notes:** have a family greet, kid/youth to share a God moment, kid/youth to lead prayers and read Scripture

**HS Youth Mission Team will serve breakfast after worship.**