

Worship Resources - **Letting Go** - <https://youtu.be/Q9SwqwRE7kk>

**15th Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,**

13<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

**Genesis 50:15-21 CEV / Romans 14:1-12/ Matthew 18:21-35 CEV**

**Intro/Prelude - *At Peace, written by*** *Eben Brusco, Sarah Brusco, Steve Carpenter*, played by church musician Annie Center, used and reported under CCLI Streaming license 20261246

## **Welcome**

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

**This morning, we will have an additional scripture reading to reflect on. As we listen to this story from Genesis 50 about Joseph and his brothers, let's give some thought how we handle situations where people have wronged us, and what would our response be in Joseph's shoes**

## **First Testament Reading - Genesis 50:15-21**

After Jacob died, Joseph's brothers said to each other, "What if Joseph still hates us and wants to get even with us for all the cruel things we did to him?"

So they sent this message to Joseph: Before our father died,

he told us, "You did some cruel and terrible things to Joseph, but you must ask him to forgive you." Now we ask you to please forgive the terrible things we did. After all, we serve the same God that your father worshiped. When Joseph heard this, he started crying.

Right then, Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to the ground in front of him and said, "We are your slaves."

But Joseph told them, "Don't be afraid! I have no right to change what God has decided.

You tried to harm me, but God made it turn out for the best, so that he could save all these people, as he is now doing.

Don't be afraid! I will take care of you and your children." After Joseph said this, his brothers felt much better.

## **Scripture Video 20200823 Genesis 50:15-21 - Robin McQuain**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owivCX9aLs8>

### **Invocation**

#### **Join me in a word of prayer.**

Compassionate-One, Lover-of-Goodness, Patience-with-Sinners, that you love us as parents love their children; that your mercy is boundless and generous, that you beckon us always and will wait forever as we find our way back to you. Open our hearts to receive your compassion; And then show us how to forgive, So that we may be vessels of resurrection hope in our troubled world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (light candle) Amen.**

**In our Epistle reading this morning, Paul talks about how we interact with those whose beliefs differ from our own. Let's give some thought as we listen to his words to the Roman church about how we handle those interactions in our own lives.**

#### **Epistle Reading - Romans 14:1-12 CEV**

Welcome all the Lord's followers, even those whose faith is weak. Don't criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours.

Some think it is all right to eat anything, while those whose faith is weak will eat only vegetables.

But you should not criticize others for eating or for not eating. After all, God welcomes everyone.

What right do you have to criticize someone else's servants? Only their Lord can decide if they are doing right, and the Lord will make sure that they do right.

Some of the Lord's followers think one day is more important than another. Others think all days are the same. But each of you should make up your own mind.

Any followers who count one day more important than another day do it to honor their Lord. And any followers who eat meat give thanks to God, just like the ones who don't eat meat.

Whether we live or die, it must be for God, rather than for ourselves.

Whether we live or die, it must be for the Lord. Alive or dead, we still belong to the Lord.

This is because Christ died and rose to life, so that he would be the Lord of the dead and of the living.

Why do you criticize other followers of the Lord? Why do you look down on them? The day is coming when God will judge all of us.

In the Scriptures God says,

“I swear by my very life  
that everyone will kneel down  
and praise my name!”

And so, each of us must give an account to God for what we do.

## **Scripture Video Romans 14:1-12**

## ***Don't Criticise Others***

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhksEigHG5Q>

## **A Time of Prayer**

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com , and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

## **Joys and Concerns**

Prayers for Tammy Worden who has been going a rough time. Please pray that she is able to resolve her current issues with Lady and the puppies, and can then find permanent shelter.

Also let's also keep those traveling in our prayers. Our own Annie Center is traveling this week to Baltimore for several weeks, and Haile and Nancy are traveling to Nebraska to visit family. May their travels be safe and uneventful.

Also, let's pray for Sylvia's sister-in-law Connie who had brain surgery this week. May God grant her healing and relief, and give strength and comfort to her family. Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

## Pastoral Prayer

**Gracious God,** When we look over our shoulders at fear shadowing us today, you go before us into tomorrow, making a path through the sea of yesterday's doubts.

When our legs tremble from the effort of standing up for what you hope for all Creation, you stand at our side, offering your hope's strength.

**Cloud of Grace,** we offer our love to you. When we turn our hearts into deserts of stony bitterness, you transform them into oases of joy. When we come up with all sorts of rules for those who come to us seeking to find you, you tear up the list, stretching wide your arms in welcoming grace.

**Servant of all,** we offer our lives to you. When we would clasp old worries to our Hearts, you open our eyes to that hope which paves the path ahead of us. When we spend each day consumed with doubts and fears, you remind us that this day is the time to honor God, by serving God's children.

**Mist of Mercy,** we offer our hearts to you. God in Community, Holy in One, as you are all to us, so we would offer all we are to you. Amen

*In our gospel lesson this morning, Peter asks how to handle being wronged by others. Listen to Jesus' response, and think about what forgiveness really means to you.*

### ***Gospel Lesson Matthew 18:21-35 CEV***

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?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.<sup>[a]</sup>

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold<sup>[b]</sup> was brought to him.

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.

"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'

The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

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

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

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.

Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’

In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

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

## ***Scripture Video Matthew 18:21-35***

## ***The Unforgiving Servant***

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Od41RNwxYnQ&t=26s>

## **Message – Letting Go**

Last week we looked at the importance of love, and what the bible says about the steps we should take when we have been wronged by another. This week, we have several scriptures that discuss conflict and what our perspective should be. So how do we deal with conflict with each other realistically? And how does love and grace fit into that interaction? Do we really forgive each other, and what does that look like? Today's scriptures are all about what our perspective should be and what forgiveness looks like, within our personal lives, and within the church.

Joseph's story from Genesis gives us a good place to start thinking about what it means to forgive, and what justice and mercy look like. Joseph has all the reason in the world to want vengeance. Here are his brothers who, out of jealousy and greed, literally plotted to kill him and sold him into slavery. He certainly had reason to want to seek justice, to see his ill treatment avenged. It's the instinct most of us have. When we are wronged, we want to see justice done. We want to see those who have mistreated us to experience something negative for what they have done. We'll wish “karma” on them, or say something like “what goes around comes around.” I think we've probably all had experiences in our childhood where we have tried to enact our own justice on our siblings or friends.

There's a story about a lady who had two children. The older son was 7 years old and the little girl about 2½ years old. She heard this terrible scream upstairs and as she ran upstairs she found out that the little girl was pulling the hair of her brother. He was crying out in pain. The mother gently removed the girl's hands off her brother's hair and said to her brother, "Sweetheart, your sister does not understand that it hurts." The son nodded okay to it. But as she was walking down the stairs, she heard this blood curdling sound and ran to see what happened again. The boy was sitting next to the girl and the girl was now crying out in pain, and he said, "Now she understands!" Many times we are like the little boy who wants to make sure that the person who has hurt us knows what it is like to be hurt. But the forgiveness Joseph models for us means we sacrifice our right to inflict pain on the one who has pained us. He makes the very valid point that neither he, nor any of us for that matter, can presume to take God's place and pass judgment on others. The struggle is real.

As Christians, we often find it can be easy to forgive, but to forget can be very difficult. We can learn from the experience, but the hurt and resentment often linger. There's also the story of a little girl who was being punished by eating alone in the corner of the dining room. The family paid no attention to her until they heard her pray: "I thank Thee, Lord, for preparing a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

But it can also be all too easy to just focus on those times you have been wronged, to see Joseph's side of the story, but to overlook the struggle that those who have wronged another often go through as well. Those who toil under the tremendous guilt and burden of the sinful behavior of wronging another often struggle with self-doubt and a lack of self-worth. As those wronged struggle with true forgiveness, those who bear guilt suffer with the fear that they cannot possibly be forgiven for what they have done. This struggle led Joseph's brothers to offer themselves as slaves to him to atone for their sin, not seeing how he could possibly see value in them again.

Brian McClaren, in his book *We Make the Road by Walking*, addresses this turn of events between Joseph and his brothers. "When his brothers groveled before him, as Joseph had dreamed they 'would when he was a boy, and when they offered to be treated as slaves rather than brothers, Joseph didn't gloat. He refused to play God, judge them evil, and sentence them to death or enslavement. Instead, he reinterpreted the whole story of their relationship. Their evil intent had been overshadowed by God's good intent, so that Joseph could save their lives. He had suffered and he had been blessed, he realized, for their benefit. So instead of imitating their resentful and violent example, he imitated the gracious heart of God. By refusing to play God in judging them, he imaged God in showing kindness to them. In this way, Joseph — the victim of mistreatment by his brothers — became the hero. The one everyone cruelly rejected was the one whose kindness everyone needed. The one who was considered favored wasn't made superior so others could grovel before him; he was made strong so he could serve them." Joseph provides the role model for all of us in times when we are wronged by others. We're called to rise above and show

kindness, generosity, forgiveness, in other words, love with no condition. After all, we serve and follow a God of love, of grace.

1 John tells us that God *is* love. But what about our brothers and sisters in the church? Jesus tells us that we are to forgive basically without limit as well. In Matthew we are to forgive 77 times in the NIV translation, but other translations say 70 times 7. Regardless, it's meant to be such a formidable number that the implication is we forgive every time one of our sisters or brothers in Christ sins against us.

But what about other kinds of conflict? What do we do when we disagree on matters of faith and practice? Paul tells us that depends on the nature of the conflict. We shouldn't sweat the petty stuff, and maybe even some of the not so petty stuff. When my mother went to bible college in the late 60's, the big debate between churches that practiced believer's baptism was whether the correct baptism was three times forward or one times backward. These were heated debates that went back and forth for years between the Baptists and Anabaptists, all arguing which was the most authentic, as if someone was there to witness Jesus' baptism 2000 years ago. I'm sure they used their best theological resources to support their arguments. But the point I think Paul is making is does that kind of stuff really matter in the big picture? And is that how we should be spending our time together as the body of Christ, arguing the finer points of worship and ritual? His argument is that difference within the body is not a bad thing, and a natural occurrence as each person thinks and reasons differently. What is important is that we're on the same page when it comes to the Gospel and salvation.

Summarizing Paul's argument, there are 4 criteria we should look at when we differ or conflict arises concerning faith and practice in the church. Should the differing practice be based on an well-thought out, personal conviction? Does this difference honor and give thanks to God? Is the end result continuing to live according to God's ways?

Diversity of behavior and practice should not cause contempt or judgment among Christians if it is based on personal conviction, if it honors God, and if it takes place according to God's design as evidenced in Christ's example and teachings rather than on strictly personal grounds. Do we have things in our church, or our denomination that some people may do differently than we would, or how we've always done it in the past? Our first inclination may be that we need to correct that, or that another way of doing things or looking at things isn't right. But according to Paul, some diversity is fine. As long as the core message doesn't change, some variation is OK. What's important is that we don't let it divide us, that we don't allow it to cause conflict and negativity.

As someone who generally attends our Annual Conference most years, I see how this can cause negativity. We fight over the same differences between different groups within the church year after year. And I'm not minimizing the importance of either side in these debates. Everyone involved is very committed to their points of view and each side just as passionately believes theirs is the correct interpretation of scripture. But I can also see

what Paul is trying to avoid with his instructions to not let these kind of differences cause conflict and division. When I think of the hours and days every year we spend debating who is right and who is wrong, I often reflect on what wondrous things we could accomplish as the church without these endless arguments. And when we get too caught up in these disputes, we can find ourselves feeling resentful, much in the same way we do when we cannot find it in ourselves to forgive others. It's much the same process in that we never let go of what is causing us to feel hurt and negative. Like forgiveness, it's letting go of our need to have vindication, of having that satisfaction of winning, of proving others to be wrong and seeing them receive the treatment we feel they deserve. It's giving it away to God, in whose hands it belongs. But sometimes we struggle with letting it go.

There's a story about two monks walking through the countryside. They were on their way to another village to help bring in the crops. As they walked, they spied an old woman sitting at the edge of a river. She was upset because there was no bridge, and she could not get across on her own. The first monk kindly offered, "We will carry you across if you would like." "Thank you," she said gratefully, accepting their help. So the two men joined hands, lifted her between them and carried her across the river. When they got to the other side, they set her down, and she went on her way. After they had walked another mile or so, the second monk began to complain. "Look at my clothes," he said. "They are filthy from carrying that woman across the river. And my back still hurts from lifting her. I can feel it getting stiff." The first monk just smiled and nodded his head. A few more miles up the road, the second monk griped again, "My back is hurting me so badly, and it is all because we had to carry that silly woman across the river! I cannot go any farther because of the pain." The first monk looked down at his partner, now lying on the ground, moaning. "Have you wondered why I am not complaining?" he asked. "Your back hurts because you are still carrying the woman. But I set her down five miles ago." That is what many of us are like in dealing with conflict and forgiveness. We are that second monk who cannot let go. We hold on to the pain of the past conflict, we won't let the burden go. And how does that benefit anybody? After all, it is the Almighty who is the real judge at the end of all things. When we don't give those weights we carry up where they belong, as Joseph says, we put ourselves in God's place, and those are shoes we can never hope and should never presume to try to fill.

Like Joseph, compassion and service are the values we are to emulate, not judgment and vengeance. It's not about proving your right or feeling justified, it's about forgiving and loving your brothers and sisters, and not letting your differences define your lives together. We are all members in this body, and a body whose members do not work together, does not function, nor does it last. I pray we all seek to live into the loving community to which we've all been called. Amen.



## **Call to Serve.**

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. As we listen to this interlude, played by Annie, let's give some thought how we can show love and forgiveness to others this week, perhaps thinking of someone we can truly forgive in our own lives.

## **A Time for Reflection**

### **Reflection on the Word *[video] Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive***

*written by Rosamond Eleanor Herklots,*  
played by church musician Annie Center,  
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## **The Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Generous God, May our gifts become symbols of our intention to minister with you  
To satisfy the needs of those whom you love. Amen.

## **Blessing/Assurance**

The peace of Christ is with you. God knows you and loves you for who you truly are. God knows your heart, and that you long to do right. Trust in God's ways and show mercy. Pursue peace, love, and forgiveness. You are not alone. You are loved and carried by God. Go and share the good news, loving and forgiving one another. Amen.

**As we extinguish this candle, may we carry it's Spirit-light into the world with us this week, and be the beacon of the Beloved we are called to be. Amen.**

**Postlude *He Looked Beyond My Fault***, written by Dottie Rambo,  
played by church musician Annie Center,  
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