

Anchored in Forgiveness

February—April 2019

Quarterly Topic from Hope Lutheran Church





for I will
forgive their iniquity,
and I will
remember their sin
no more

Jeremiah 31:34

When was the last time you overheard the conversation among tech-savvy teenagers? Did you understand much of it? For me there has always been a bit of frustration when in my role as a school board member I engage in conversation with educators. There is an appreciation for their service, background and passion for their profession, but the conversations are usually filled with acronyms, e.g. ESL, ELA, STAAR, DAR, EOC, etc. All of them are important to the educational process but I am often left in the dark for lack of definition. They know whereof they speak; I do not. There is a constant request for definition to aid in my grasping of the content and context of their speech. This is no reflection on their ability to communicate but I am lacking. We in the church often are guilty of the same jargon infused communication. We use words in some sort of verbal, insider speech. We “know” the concept and use the shorthand to move on to other matters. We expect others to understand. This edition of *Anchored in Forgiveness* is intended to address that parlance.

Let me begin to build the foundation for the concept/ definition of forgiveness in the Old Covenant. Violation of the law of God required blood. The “Sin Offerings” of the Old Testament were the means by which forgiveness was attained. He who offended would sacrifice a sheep or goat (his likelihood!) whose blood would be cast against the base of the altar and the body of which would be burned on the altar, a sacrifice satisfying the legally required penalty for trespassing the boundary of behaviors prescribed by God. Sin was costly in God’s eyes and required a costly recompense. Sacrifice offered. Sin forgiven. Spring forward for just a moment to the acclamation of John about his cousin Jesus...”behold the Lamb of God,” an all-sufficient sacrifice to pardon sin.

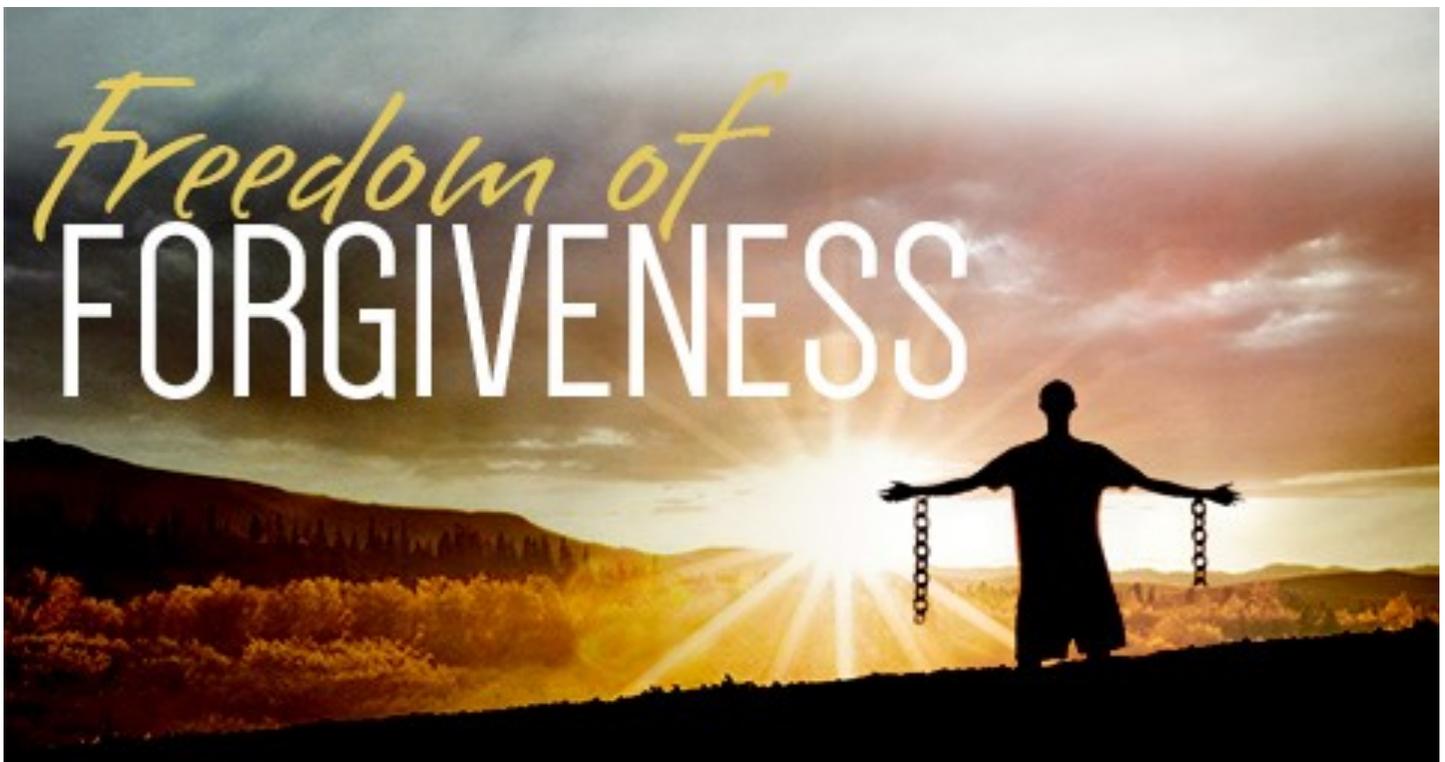
The New Testament understanding of forgiveness has its roots in the Greek verb λύω which translates to loose or to turn loose of or to destroy. The concept of forgiveness implies that God turns loose of the violations of which the sinner is accused and guilty. This declaration of “loosing” fits very well with the promise that God made through Jeremiah in Chapter 31, “and I will remember their sin no more.” He doesn’t hang on to it; he looses it because blood has been shed, the very Blood of the Lamb! Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, forgiveness holds its spot right in the center of the prayer, “forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who have trespassed against me.” We fervently request and readily dispense loosing of the stepping over the line, going where we are not permitted to go.

In this edition we have decided to focus our efforts on the concept of forgiveness. Our understanding of forgiveness is fundamental to the Christian faith and life.

The practical application of the concept of loosing finds a home in the contrition (feeling sorry), confession (naming the sin), absolution (loosing), and repentance (turning back to our God) practice by the Christian. This fourfold process is what believers practice in forgiveness with their God, with their fellow believers and even those who are not believers. It is gratifying to watch how forgiveness flows from our Lord to me and through me to others. To the contrary, over the years I have also witnessed the result of not loosing, of not forgiving. The heart of the one who hangs on to the hurt, not loosing it, becomes hard, negatively effecting their entire attitude toward life and others. No wonder Jesus taught us the Fourth Petition of his Prayer, recognizing that receiving and dispensing forgiveness is indispensable to living the abundant life. Forgiveness is the lubricant facilitating the interactions we have with each other, freeing us to be, knowing and trusting that the inevitable hurt will be loosed!

We as the Body of Christ, the Church, are stewards of this great gift of forgiveness. For a world that is desperate to get out from under the load of so much wrong, we have the answer. The price for those wrongs has been paid, once for all, in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and we get to give it away for free. We readily practice forgiveness for we have been forgiven so much. Hearts are pliable and hands are readied for service. How will you choose to liberally practice the freedom of forgiveness? To whom will you loose? May God's grace, mercy and forgiveness flow through you to a world he loves so much!

— *Pastor Ralph*



She's been having back problems—like, come home from practice in tears kind of back problems, living on ibuprofen and a heating pad kind of back problems. So, we went to the doctor who listened, looked, poked and prodded, ordered an x-ray and wrote up a recommendation for physical therapy. She also weighed the back pack—that ridiculously overloaded bag that she totes around all day at school in addition to her other activities. It checked in at a surprising sixteen pounds—surprising because the last time I weighed it, the bag sported a twenty-one pound load. We went through it together looking for what could be unloaded and she sacrificed a handful of note paper and index cards but beyond that all was deemed necessary, can't let it go.



I read a quote once from a long forgotten source, “Forgiveness is like putting down a 40 pound pack and walking away.” I can barely lift the twenty pound one—what a relief to plop the forty pound version and move on! Except that we often don’t or won’t—we look through the bag and can, perhaps, let a little go, but what’s in there is so important, we insist it’s necessary and trudge on even knowing it is impacting our physical, mental and spiritual health. Maybe not so surprisingly, it’s the little ones among us who do it best—for them forgiveness generally comes as easily as breathing—when is it that we stock pile enough experiences, get burned enough times to become more miserly with our forgiveness? It doesn’t take long, just a few short years into grade school, you’ll see far less of the hug and make up behavior of toddlers. For teens there are any number of new experiences assailing them—tougher classes, teachers with higher expectations, the acceptance/rejection process of sports teams, fine arts auditions and college applications, and don’t even get me started on the peer pressure, relationships and social media. High school is a minefield of opportunities to practice, fail and succeed with apologies and forgiveness and, sadly, the adult population often offers too few role models for the process.

Psychiatrist Karen Swartz offers some steps to developing a more forgiving attitude:

- **Reflect and remember.** Reflecting on an event or incident, consider not just the actions of the other but also your own—how you reacted and how that continues to impact you.
- **Empathize with the other person.** Consider what might have prompted the other person to have acted or felt the way they did—try to see the situation from their perspective. Forgive deeply. I can so clearly recall a situation in which I had been wronged and was waiting to confront the person who had so deeply wounded me. I was drawn, while waiting, to that familiar passage in 1 Corinthians 13 that convicts our measure of love, “ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It



always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” (vs 4-7). My heart wanted to rebel but all I could think of was Christ on the cross for me—how could I offer anything less to this other person and offer it completely, “no record of wrongs,” no going back?

- **Let go of expectations.** You putting down that pack doesn’t mean the other person will go along with it. Forgive to relieve yourself of the burden, let go of the expectation that forgiving will fix everything.
- **Decide to forgive.** “Once you make that choice, seal it with an action. If you don’t feel you can talk to the person who wronged you, write about your

forgiveness in a journal or even talk about it to someone else in your life whom you trust.”

- **Forgive yourself.** Don’t leave yourself out of the process, often we find it harder to forgive ourselves than to forgive others. Again, reflect on the ultimate forgiveness in Christ.

Often, forgiveness is a process—like healing that overworked back, we approach with intentionality, with daily exercise and therapy and sometimes a little comfort food! In time, those “necessities” weighing you down may seem less important to hold on to.

— Robin Groeper



I'm sorry. Will you please forgive me? I've said those words. I would guess you've said those words. Perhaps your children have said those words, or at least the "I'm sorry" part. What about the "forgive me?"

At the beginning of worship service each Sunday, we all say those words. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. One of the pastors says "Let us then confess our sins to God our Father," and we respond by admitting that we are "by nature sinful and unclean," and then we ask "have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us..." About midway through service, versions of those words surface again in the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Agnus Dei. Why do we need so many reminders of our sinful nature? I think it is because of what follows. The forgiveness.

When I taught preschool years ago, one of my students almost always followed his apologies with a request for forgiveness. Outside of worship services, I wasn't accustomed to hearing anyone actually ask for that forgiveness part with each admission of wrongdoing. Hearing a four year old ask for forgiveness gave me a new perspective on what forgiveness means in our every day. As adults, we probably know that we are given a fresh start each day. An opportunity to steer clear of the mistakes we are prone to making, or least be more mindful of our habits and behaviors. We also know that when we mess up, again, we can turn to God, like a friend, like our Father, and ask for forgiveness. I'm not saying it's easy. I'm not saying that we can always just let things go, forgive and move on. Often, we are our own worst critics not forgiving ourselves and not asking others for

forgiveness. We don't take the words from Sunday worship into the six days that follow, and when Sunday rolls around again, we need the repetition of "I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

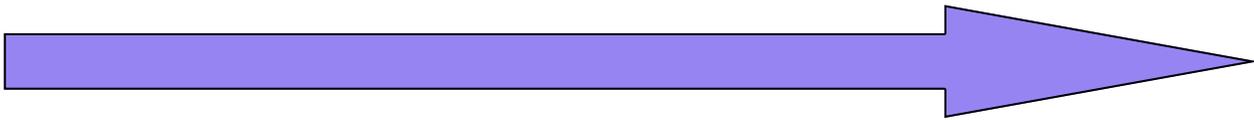
So back to my four year old student. What if we teach our children to make the forgiveness request part of their apology? Not only admit their mistake, but ask for a chance to start over. The same chance God grants us, and them, as many times as necessary. Teach them the blessing that forgiveness is through Jesus birth and death. Life gets messy. We do things we shouldn't. We hurt people we love. We don't do the things we should at times. If we don't know that we are forgiven, those mistakes can start to feel heavy, even to a four year old, and especially to a fourteen year old. We hear the forgiveness in worship each Sunday. Where does your child

hear that part of the equation? Sure, they are probably in worship with you, but I'm not sure they realize the importance of the words we repeat each week. Make it part of the next six days. Make it part of your everyday routine. A part of the conversation just like "how was your day?" Let your children know that you make mistakes, and when you say you're sorry, ask for forgiveness, the chance to start fresh.

You can easily Google "forgiveness object lesson" and come up with many different ways to create a visual. Taste a lemon and then taste something sweet. Let playdough sit out for several hours and then add water to it to soften it back up. Draw a heart on a clean piece of paper and make a pencil mark for each sin, then erase those marks and you get a clean heart again. I encourage you to try at least one of the Google ideas with your children. You can find one idea here: <https://mothersniche.com/lesson-forgiveness-free-printable-lesson-visual-activity/>.

The lesson linked above actually talks about how we need to be forgiving, which is an equally important part of the equation. If we are going to ask for second chances, we must be willing to grant them as well. Not always so easy, but if we can incorporate these topics into our everyday conversations, I think they might get a little easier as time goes by. One day, the "I'm sorry" part may be just naturally followed by the "please forgive me" part like it was for my four year old student. And, the affirmation that we are forgiven may just make it easier for us to forgive others.

—Krista Beken



Holy Week Schedule

Sunday, April 14 | Palm Sunday Services | 8:00 AM & 11:00 AM

Thursday, April 18 | Seder Supper / Stripping of the Altar | 6:00 PM

Friday, April 19 | Good Friday Tenebrae | 7:30 PM

Saturday, April 20 | Vigil of Easter | 7:30 PM

Sunday, April 21 | Sunrise Services | 6:00 AM

Sunday, April 21 | Easter Services | 8:00 AM, 9:30 AM & 11:00 AM

Mark your calendar

Soup Supper | Wednesday | March 6 | 5:30 PM
(only one of the Lenten season)

HYMN REFLECTION

Amazing Grace

Text: John Newton (1725-1807) Tune: NEW BRITAIN (folk tune, first printed in 1831)

Lutheran Worship # 509 Lutheran Book of Worship #448 Lutheran Service Book # 744

The depth of God's forgiveness is epitomized in this great text and in the life of its author. "I once was lost but now am found" is a phrase that communicates a lot in only a few words. In recent years this hymn has sometimes been labeled as the most popular English hymn. There was a PBS special about it some years ago. A 2006 movie called "Amazing Grace" told the story of William Wilberforce, who was a friend of the writer of this hymn. The writer's name was John Newton, whose tombstone reads

John Newton, Clerk
Once an Infidel and Libertine
A servant of slavers in Africa
was by the rich Mercy of our Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ
Preserved, Restored, Pardoned,
and Appointed to Preach the Faith
he had long labored to destroy

Newton was English, born in London. He received a Christian upbringing, but it was hampered when his mother died when he was only 7. By age 11, he had joined his merchant father on 5 voyages of the Mediterranean. Later, he was drafted into the navy, where he tried to continue his religious life, but eventually discarded it.

After a time, he deserted the navy and was caught, whipped and demoted. Later the navy released him and he went to work on a trading vessel, soon ending up in Africa where he went to work for a slaver off Sierra Leone. What looked like a comfortable position turned sour as Newton was treated as badly as the slaves. He wrote to his father for help but in the meantime was able to transfer to another position. His father dispatched a ship for him and Newton reluctantly returned to England. On the way home, he read Thomas a 'Kempis spiritual classic *The Imitation of Christ* and experienced a spiritual awakening.

In time, he married his longtime sweetheart and become captain of a slave ship. Like many at that time, he initially saw no conflict between slavery and his Christian faith. Soon, he became a pastor, being ordained in 1764. Later in life, he was a mentor to William Wilberforce, a young lawmaker who crusaded against slavery in Britain. In 1778, breaking many years of silence on the issue, Newton authored a forceful pamphlet opposing the slave trade and apologizing for his participation in it. *Amazing Grace* was published in a hymn collection in 1779.

Wilberforce and Newton's relationship was part of the movie *Amazing Grace* concerning the end of slavery in Britain. In 2015 a Broadway musical told Newton's life story.

The tune we use with Amazing Grace was not attached to it until long after the words were written. Newton may have died before hearing it. The title of the hymn was originally *Faith's Review and Expectation*, but it eventually became known by its opening line.

Of the original 6 stanzas, Lutherans have usually omitted stanza 2 (*T'was grace that taught my heart to fear . . .*) because of the confusing mixture of *grace* with the term *fear*, a term which we usually associate with *Law* rather than *Grace*. Newton's original final stanza is rarely used. *The Lutheran Service Book* includes an additional stanza (*When we've been there 10,000 years . . .*) which, though popular, was not written by Newton and which was added around 1790. Some list John P. Rees as the writer of this newer final stanza.

Lutheran Service Book includes four other hymns by Newton. They are #524 *How Sweet the name of Jesus Sounds*, # 648 *Glorious Things of You Are Spoken*, #779 *Come My Soul, With Every Care*, and #921 *On What Has Now Been Sown*.

References: *Lutheran Worship Hymnal Companion* Fred Precht Concordia Publishing House 1992
www.amazinggracemovie.com



the **GIFT** of **FORGIVENESS**

The life of John Newton is an example of God's forgiveness. Newton's journey took him away from God, but he was returned and ended up with a powerful testimony of God's love and grace. We simulate this journey in miniature when we participate in Confession and Absolution before our worship services. At some times in history this process took place outdoors on the church steps. As we receive forgiveness and enter into God's presence, worship begins as a joyful celebration of God's grace and forgiveness. In some traditions that time of Confession and Absolution can be called "Reconciliation". Through that process we become reconciled with God, or perhaps we renew our reconciliation. By the time we share the "peace" with one another we are demonstrating that, as Christ's forgiven followers, we can be (and are) reconciled with one another. While at times we may feel as though we are simply following directions in worship services, as worshippers we do well to truly use these opportunities to receive God's forgiveness and share it with one another.

I am pleased to be serving Hope as Director of Music. In case you have forgotten, I arrived here in October. My wife and youngest son will make the move from Nebraska (hopefully) in early June. I am excited to be working in a vibrant music ministry here at Hope. I am continuing many of the programs and traditions in worship music here, but also considering how we might grow or transform to get even people involved and use our resources to their full potential. If you have never been involved in music ministry here, or if you have been away for a while, please get in touch with me and let me know your interests. We do have room for more singers in our Children's Choir and Sanctuary Choir and more instrumentalists in our Brass, Orchestra, and Hand Bell groups.

— *Michael Kesar*



If we confess our sins,
he is faithful and just to
forgive us our sins and to
cleans us from all
unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

You know these words:

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

We say these words as an introduction to confession and absolution that begins many of our worship services. We confess our sins. We are absolved – forgiven of those

sins. And we move on. And we come back next Sunday and do it all over again. Is that it? Does confession and forgiveness only happen on Sunday mornings? Or do we just go through the motions. We know all those words and can say them in our sleep. But do we mean them? Is that it? What about the rest of the week? What about the rest of our lives? How does forgiveness play out in our day-to-day among family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors?

Whose fault is it?

I noticed, very early on, that when something went wrong, my daughters always tried to answer the question, “Whose fault is it?” That’s usually always the first move we make: to accuse – someone else – when things go wrong. We must find the perpetrator, and bring them to justice. That’s just our default position. Words from the prayer our Lord taught throw cold water on our default position: *“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”* Our God has been so amazingly gracious and merciful to us in our Savior, Jesus. He showed us what true forgiveness is, and has actually forgiven us! Because we have been forgiven, we forgive others. It’s not our default position, by any stretch of the imagination. It means letting down our guard. It means letting go of resentment, stubbornness, pride, and control. But the end result of forgiving the one who has wronged you: peace and restoration. And that’s not just “forgiving them in your heart.” It means actually telling them those words: “I forgive you.” Powerful words. Healing words.

I forgive you.



Peter asked Jesus: *“How many times will I forgive my brother who has sinned against me? As many as seven times?”* Jesus’ response? *“Not just seven times, but seventy times seven.”* In other words, there’s no limit. There is no limit to the forgiveness Christ has given us through His death and resurrection. Likewise, there is to be no limit to our forgiveness for each other. A lot easier said than done! To reinforce the message, Jesus tells Peter the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Go read it at Matthew 18:21-35. The extent of Christ’s forgiveness is unimaginably extravagant and over the top. As His brothers and sisters, as His followers, we are to likewise forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us. I’ve heard it said, *“Once you forgive, you have to forget.”* Yeah, right. I can recall, with clarity, many times that people have wronged me. I certainly remember the wrong. But it is difficult to remember whether or not I have forgiven. You will likely say the same. But this is how

incredibly merciful our God is: *“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”* – Isaiah 43:25. *“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”* – Jeremiah 31:34b. Our God does what we cannot do or refuse to do: He who knows all things remembers our sins no more because of what Jesus has done for us.

Our God does not hold our sins against us. He forgives those who return to Him. So at the beginning of the service during confession and absolution, I urge you to make a conscious effort to return to Him. Confess. And hear those awesome words of Christ’s forgiveness for you. And then go and do likewise. You are a baptized child of God. Be one who lets it go. Be one who forgives. Be one who reconciles. Be one who restores. All because you have been loved. You have been forgiven. You have reconciled. You have been restored. You are free! Go in peace!

– Pastor Jon



HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH
1804 S. Friendswood Dr.
P.O. Box 1076
Friendswood, TX 77549

Return Services Requested

A Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #14
Friendswood, TX 77549

Ralph W. Hobratschk, Senior Pastor

Jonathan E. Petering, Associate Pastor

