

## And Forgive Us Our Trespasses

Matthew 6: 9-12a

First Sunday in Lent, February 21, 2021

Aledo UMC

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<sup>9</sup> (Jesus said unto them,) “After this manner therefore pray ye: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses...’”

### Sermon, “Forgive Us Our Trespasses”

*This is the sixth of ten sermons on the Lord’s Prayer*

When I was growing up, *The Milwaukee Journal* published a four-page “Green Sheet” every weekday—on green paper. There’s a lot of nostalgia among Milwaukee natives for the Green Sheet, as it was a staple of the paper for over 80 years. That’s where you’d find the crossword puzzle, human interest stories, and local advice columnist Mrs. Lone Quinby Griggs (who wrote for *The Journal* for 51 years). That’s also where you’d find the comics: Peanuts and the Gang, Blondie and Dagwood, Tumbleweeds, Beetle Bailey, and Dick Tracy.

Dick Tracy was cool, even as a comic strip character. He had a square jaw, yellow trench coat and yellow fedora. And of course, his two-way wrist television-radio.

In 1990, Warren Beatty brought Dick Tracy to the big screen, along with some of his most memorable villains: Flattop, Itchy, Numbers, Pruneface, and of course, Al Pacino as Big Boy Caprice and Dustin Hoffman as Mumbles.

*(Clip is played)*

Mumbles is a fitting character for our discussion of the Lord’s Prayer. Why? Because for many of us, we recite the Lord’s Prayer so often that we just mumble our way through it. And I don’t care how good of a prayer warrior you are, we’ve all had times when we’ve mumbled our way through the Lord’s Prayer.

I can think of at least three situations in which we are most prone to mumble our way through the Lord’s Prayer: (1) **We’ve forgotten where we are.** When I was in my master’s program at McCormick Theological Seminary, I went to chapel where they prayed the Lord’s Prayer using the words *debts* and *debtors*. And it always took extra effort on my part to pray the Lord’s Prayer that way, using the words *debts* and *debtors*. Then on the weekend, I led worship at the Mazon and Verona UMC’s where we used the words *trespasses* and *those who trespass against us*. I can’t tell you the number of times I prayed, “Forgive us our debt passes as we forgive those who pass debts against us.” But when you’re mumbling, who can tell what you’re really saying?

(2) **We don’t really want to admit that we’ve sinned.** Remember what it was like when you tried to get your son or your daughter to fess up to something they’d done?

We grow older, but we're still kids inside; we still don't want to admit that we've sinned. But that's one reason why it's important for us to pray the Lord's Prayer.

(3) **We really don't want to forgive "those who trespass against us."** So we turn into Mumbles. But that's next week's sermon.

Last week we considered the petition, "Gives us this day our daily bread" in light of psychologist Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" which arranges our needs in a pyramid, with the most the most basic, physiological needs at the bottom where they serve as the foundation for our more psychic and spiritual needs which are found further up on the pyramid.

We see this hierarchy of needs at work in the Lord's Prayer. After centering us on God, Jesus invites us to address our most basic physical needs which are summed up in the familiar little petition, *give us this day our daily bread*. Jesus understands that you cannot adequately talk to people about their soul if their stomachs are empty. So Jesus first invites us to address our basic human needs for food, drink, clothing and shelter: they're all summed up in that little petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." Only then does Jesus invite us to address our more profound, spiritual needs by inviting us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses."

Jesus invites us to offer that petition because **our God is in the business of forgiving sinners**. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and told his disciples that soon he would be arrested, tried and crucified, Peter spoke up for the group and said, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). But just a few hours later, Peter not only failed to stand with Jesus in his hour of need; he couldn't even pray with him for an hour in Gethsemane. And as Jesus endured the indignity of an illegal trial, three times Peter denied even knowing Jesus. But after his resurrection, over breakfast on the shore of Galilee, Jesus forgave Peter and restored him to full fellowship and gave him the responsibility to carry out his mission. **God is in the business of forgiving sinners**.

To the sanctimonious Jewish religious leaders who, during Jesus' trial, stood outside of Pilate's praetorium because they did not want to enter it and render themselves unclean, thereby disqualifying themselves from participating in the Passover—to those Jewish leaders, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). **God is in the business of forgiving sinners**.

To the Roman soldiers who spat upon him and mocked him and bartered for his clothes, robbing him of every thread of dignity; to those cruel, bloodthirsty, blood-weary soldiers who drove the nails through his flesh and into the wood of that wretched and blessed tree, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). **God is in the business of forgiving sinners**.

Even as Jesus hung on Calvary's cruel cross, he offered forgiveness to a criminal who had been crucified with him. "Truly I tell you," Jesus said, "today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). **God is in the business of forgiving sinners**.

We are sinners, not because of what we have done, but because of what we are. The petition, “forgive us our sins,” brings us face to face with what we are; however, we offer that petition after we pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” And praying, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” brings us face to face with *whose* we are. We belong to God and **God is in the business of forgiving sinners.**

Somehow, in a mystery that I cannot fully understand but fully accept, “the blood of Jesus, God’s Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:8). That’s what John wrote in his first epistle. He quickly adds,

<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

In 1 Samuel 13:14, God called David “a man after my own heart” and raised him up to be king of all Israel. God blessed him with wives and wealth and power. But David abused that power and lusted after a woman named Bathsheba. First, David became a “Peeping Tom.” Then he summoned her to his palace and raped her. Later when she revealed to him that he had impregnated her, David tried trick her husband Uriah into thinking the child was his. When that plot failed, David had Uriah killed. However, when David came face-to-face with the enormity of his sin, he fasted and prayed for forgiveness. His prayer is recorded in Psalm 51:

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.

<sup>2</sup> Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.

<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.

<sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are right in your verdict  
and justified when you judge.

<sup>5</sup> Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (Ps. 51).

And God answered that prayer. God forgave David. **God is in the business of forgiving sinners**, and so we pray, “Forgive us our trespasses.” But I’m not preaching to a congregation of rapists and murderers, and I don’t have to impose some sort of guilt on you that you don’t deserve.

“Forgive us our trespasses simply reminds us of our daily need for grace. To that end, at the back of the church you will find a basket of little burlap squares. In the Bible,

repentance was often accompanied by sackcloth and ashes. Please take a little square of burlap as a simple reminder of your daily need for God's grace. Put it where you will see it: on your refrigerator or your mirror. Or tuck it in your purse or wallet or keep it by your devotional materials and let it be a little nudge from the Holy Spirit to remind you of your daily need for grace.

That's not to say your scrap of burlap is intended to impose a guilt trip on you. That's not the purpose for it. Rather, it is simply to remind you of your daily need to examine your heart and have it cleansed of all unrighteousness.

But there's another dimension to praying, "Forgive us our trespasses," and that dimension is found in two letters: *us*. We pray *forgive us*, rather than, *forgive me*. When we pray "forgive us our trespasses, we are not only praying for ourselves; we are also interceding on behalf of our family, our community, our nation, and our world. "Spare us as a people, O Lord, for we are sinners in need of your grace. So please, forgive us our trespasses." And we pray by faith that God will hear us and will forgive us and will spare us as a people.

Number 1: We pray to be forgiven. Number 2: We pray to intercede on behalf of others. Number 3: And we pray that we might be formed, if only just a little bit into the image of God's Son.

We are, after all, a shaped people. And among the things that shape us are our habits. And that's where the Lord's Prayer comes in. In Luke 11, the disciples noticed that Jesus had gone to pray in a certain place, and when he finished his prayers, one of them said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples. And then Jesus gave them—and us—the Lord's Prayer.

The disciples were all Jews; prayer was not a new concept to them. They already knew how to pray. What they were really asking was, "How might we be better shaped into your followers?"

Praying the Lord's Prayer—following the patterns of prayer it presents—will more effectively shape us or form us into followers of Jesus Christ. And an important part of that shaping process is to recognize that we are indeed sinners in need of God's grace.

Have you ever tried to do something for someone, only to have that person refuse your help? It can be quite frustrating.

"Could I help you carry that load?" "Oh, no, I've got it." And as she struggles to the car, a package falls to the ground. And you wish she had accepted your offer.

"Why don't you let me pick up the tab." "Oh, no. I've got it." There's a grace in accepting the hospitality of another.

"Could I help you change that flat tire?" "Oh, no. That's not necessary. I can get it."

There's a grace in giving, but there's also a grace in receiving. Some people just don't know how to receive gifts from other people. And some people don't know how to receive gifts from God.

“Forgive us our trespasses” is an invitation to us to be grace-filled enough to accept God’s forgiveness because if we ask God to forgive us, guess what: God will forgive us because God who created us wants us to be in good standing with him. And we maintain our good standing with God by accepting the forgiveness God offers. Because **God is in the business of forgiving sinners.**

And so we develop the habit of regularly praying for God’s forgiveness. And it doesn’t matter if we use the word trespasses, debts, sins, or even oopsie daisies. But we nurture the habit of praying, and the Lord’s Prayer is our pattern, our guide.

And I assure you that if we pray, “forgive us our trespasses,” God will delight in answering that prayer. Anytime. Any place. **God is in the business of forgiving sinners.** Thanks be to God.