



Tacoma, Washington

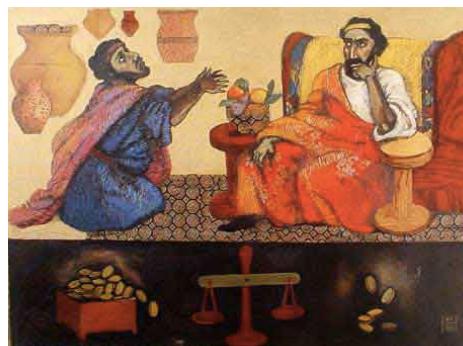
Household Worship
The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, September 13, 2020

On slavery, merciful economics, and divine punishment

Let us bear in mind that Jesus lived in Roman Palestine, a colony of the Roman Empire. That empire was a *slave empire* in which colonized people were frequently forced into slavery in a largely agricultural economy. Bells should be ringing in our ears as we remember the year 1619 in which the first Africans were brought to this country and enslaved. That Jesus draws on the experience of slavery in the parable found in today's gospel reading should alert us to the human capacity to transform other human beings into objects that serve the wealth of others.

At the same time, we should remember that the *historical* Paul (who wrote only seven of the many letters attributed to him) opposed and condemned slavery among Christians. Just read his letter to Philemon. Indeed, Paul taught clearly that there could be **no enslavement** among Christians washed into a *discipleship of equals* through the waters of Holy Baptism. Perhaps this is why we find Roman slaves serving as bishops in the early Christian community – something unthinkable in the dominant slave culture. And perhaps this is one of the reasons that early Christians were met with skepticism and intolerance: their practice of honoring the

image of God in every human being was considered foolish in a caste society.



One is mindful today of increasing economic anxiety as unemployment continues, as government subsidies to the unemployed diminish, as government assistance to families in need of food is called into question by some agents of government, as landlords chomp at the bit to evict people who cannot pay their rent due

to unemployment brought on by the virus. All this echoes in the gospel reading as **merciless economics**: *Seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.'* Are Christians not called to serve as advocates for and with our neighbors whose lives are threatened by homelessness and food insecurity?

There are moments when Matthew's portrayal of Jesus and what Jesus has to say is unnerving. While we find great tenderness in this gospel, we also find a **punitive undertone** at times that needs to be called into question: *His lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.* Really? Here's what we know about threats as a motivator of behavioral change: they work for a very short period of time but in the end will fail. They have no staying power other than to provoke fear. Indeed, we may hear in this punitive threat what every third-grader experiences as a moral world of rewards and punishment. But, here's the point: one expects the child to grow into an adult and, through loving and thoughtful parenting, begin to recognize that one is motivated in one's actions to do the good simply because it is the good and benefits others. This comes closer to the image of **God who is compassionate** and **merciful** rather than the punitivie disciplinarian who will dole out small measures of love only on occasion or, sadly, as a reward for "good" behavior. Which would you prefer?



Preparation in Autumn

We are entering into the autumn season after Pentecost, entering September and October, before the final season of November draws us to the Last Things. Worship in the household can take place anywhere but it is most appropriate at a **table**: a kitchen table or a dining table. As temperatures cool, would this not be a good time to create a **home altar** for daily and Sunday worship in the household? The color appointed for this season is **green**. It is always appropriate to have a **candle** burning during household prayer: who among us does not need more of the light of Christ in our lives? And this, too: a **bowl of water** in which one can dip one's fingers and make the sign of the cross over the forehead or heart in renewal of one's baptism into the evergreen life of God. If you have access to a garden or evergreen trees, let **flowers** and **branches** mark your place of household prayer. Anglican spirituality holds that *all the senses* can disclose God's presence – not just texts for speaking or singing. Do you have **incense**? Then burn it as you pray, letting your prayer rise with the fragrant smoke. Should you have a **crucifix**, a **cross**, or an **image of Christ**, let this holy artifact be present to focus your prayer.

If a link in this service is not live on your device, copy it and paste it into your browser.



Acclamation

Make the sign of the cross as you say,

Blessed (+) be the holy and Triune God.
And blessed be God's peaceful kingdom on earth. Amen.

Hymn

Listen as the Wakefield Cathedral Choir sings this hymn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dc5nzocyFLI>

'Forgive our sins as we forgive,'
You taught us, Lord, to pray
But you alone can grant us grace
To live the words we say

How can your pardon reach and bless
The unforgiving heart
That broods on wrongs and will not let
Old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals
The truth we dimly knew:
What trivial debts are owed to us
How great our debt to you!

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls
And bid resentment cease;
Then, bound to all in bonds of love
Our lives will spread your peace

Collect

O God of Joseph and all his brothers,
your forgiveness transcends
whatever wrong exists between us.
Grant us the courage to forgive others,
and to practice reconciliation
by the kindness of our speaking,
the sharing of our goods and talents,
and the honoring of your desire for peace.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Word of God for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Gospel is the primary reading of the day and should always be read. It follows after a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, a Psalm, and a reading from the early church. The first three scripture texts can be found here:

http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp19_RCL.html

Genesis 50:15-21

Psalm 103:(1-7), 8-13

Romans 14:1-12

Matthew 18:21-35

Read the gospel aloud, slowly, with time for reflection

The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ according to Matthew.
Glory to you, Lord Christ.

Peter came and said to Jesus, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’

“And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.

“When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Christ.

Reflection on the Gospel reading by Nadia Bolz Weber

The Rev. Nadia Bolz Weber is a Lutheran pastor, writer, and has worked as a stand-up comedian and bar tender. Her first New York Times best-selling book is *Pastriz: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint* (Jericho Books, 2013).



When I was growing up, there was a house down the street from us with slightly tattered window coverings and the front lawn was like a graveyard of broken things. Posted on the fence was a “No trespassing” sign. I remember asking my mother what trespassing was so I could be certain not to do it to anyone who lived in that weird house. When she explained that it meant going into their yard uninvited I thought, no problem. Soon after that, when I first learned the Lord’s Prayer, I thought it was weird that out of all the sins that Jesus would suggest we ask God to forgive it would be our trespassing. I pretty much made it a policy to stay out of strange yards, and since no one seemed to wander into ours uninvited, I thought I was covered. Only later did I realize that trespassing was only one of countless ways to trespass against others. And now I get it — kind of. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Jesus always seems to be pairing God’s forgiveness of us with our forgiveness of others.

But why, why is he always pairing them together? I kind of always thought that it was a way of guilting us into forgiving others — like the parable from today — hey, I forgave you 3 trillion dollars and because of that you should feel not just bad, but tortured if you don’t forgive the 200 bucks that another guy owes you. Like Jesus was saying hey, I died for you and you can’t even be nice to your little brother? As though God can get us to do the right thing if God can just make us feel bad about how much we owe God. But that just doesn’t seem to me to be the God revealed in Jesus Christ. That seems like a manipulative mother.

And these questions about what forgiveness really is, and why is it so important that we do it, was all happening for me this week amid all the 9/11 remembrances. I kept reading and re-reading these Bible passages about forgiveness, and every time I’d take a break my TV or computer would be filled with images of burning towers. Which made me wonder...can evil be forgiven?

Our human culture would say that evil is fought through justice and might. The way we combat evil is by making sure that people get what they have coming to them: An eye for an eye. You attack me and I’ll attack you. Fair is fair. And there are times in my own life when I’ve been hurt and I’m sure retaliation would make me feel better. But then when I can’t harm the person who harmed me, I just end up harming the people who love me.

So maybe retaliation, or holding on to anger about the harm done to us, or living in fear of it happening again, doesn’t actually combat evil; *it feeds it*. In the end we

can actually absorb the worst of our enemy, and on some level even become endangered of becoming them. Because it would seem that when we are sinned against, when someone else harms us, that we are in some way linked to that sin, connected to that mistreatment like a chain through which we absorb it. And we know that our anger, fear, or resentment doesn't free us at all ... it keeps us chained. And evil persists. Sin abounds. Brokenness prevails.

So it would seem. But Richard Rohr reminds us that we can tell a lot by what a person does with their suffering: *do they transmit it or do they transform it?* So while it's true that God may not prevent evil, and we may never fully understand why ... God *does* have a way of combating evil. It's not punishment and it's not retaliation, fear, or anger. It's forgiveness. Forgiveness is God's way of combating evil. Of course this offends our impulse for justice or retaliation. But that's the God revealed in Jesus. Like it or not, this is what we see at the cross.

The Prayers

Let us pray to our merciful God, saying, "hear our prayer."

Let us pray for the peace of the world and for those nations and people suffering armed conflict: the LORD grant that we learn forgiveness and abandon retribution, and live together in the bonds of compassion and peace.

O unseen Ruler of the nations: *hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for this country, for all those seeking public office, for those who serve in the military and in the Peace Corps, and for all in authority throughout the land: the LORD help them to serve this people, placing the common good above all other concerns. O just and merciful God: *hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for children and young people, for their parents, guardians, and teachers, and for the stability and peace they need in this time of pandemic: the LORD guide their growth and development, their affections and hope for the future. O Wisdom from on high: *hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for the sick, those who suffer with the coronavirus, those disabled by pain or disease, and those who care for them: the LORD heal them and raise them up so that they might know the victory of life given by our Savior Jesus Christ. O Divine healer, *hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for all who are condemned to harsh treatment, imprisonment, or slander for their labor to promote justice and speak the truth, for those who offer peaceful protest in our streets: the LORD support them, strengthen them, and keep them steadfast in their resolve. O life-giving Power of the prophets: *hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for ourselves that we may enjoy the marriage feast of heaven with the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Matthew, St. Hildegard of Bingen, and all the saints whose lives have been marked by the Holy Cross: the LORD direct our lives in the same spirit of service and sacrifice. O Refuge of the faithful: *hear our prayer.*

The Lord's Prayer

As our Savior has taught, we are bold to say,

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
Your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Anthem

Listen to this choral setting of a prayer by Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, priest, poet, and theologian of 17th c. Anglicanism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=RDX-B-H6Yf8hs&v=X-B-H6Yf8hs&feature=emb_rel_end

Open Thou mine eyes that I may see,
incline my heart that I may desire,
order my steps that I may follow,
the way of Thy commandments.

O Lord God, be Thou to me a God,
and beside Thee none else,
none else, nought else with Thee.

Vouchsafe to me, to worship Thee and
serve Thee in truth of spirit,
in reverence of body,
in blessing of lips,
in private and in public.

Concluding Collect

Fountain of all Goodness,
visit your people
and pour out your strength and courage upon us,
that we may hurry to make you welcome
not only in our concern for others,
but by serving them
generously and faithfully in your name.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.



Blessing

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord:
and the blessing of almighty God,
(+) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us forever.
Amen.

Thanksgiving at Table

Use this thanksgiving prayer whenever you have a meal this week

O God, when we have food, help us to remember the hungry.
When we have work, help us to remember the jobless.
When we have a home, help us to remember those who have no home at all.
When we are without pain, help us to remember those who suffer.
And in remembering, help us to destroy our complacency, bestir our compassion,
and be concerned enough to help, by word and deed, those who cry out for what
we take for granted. Amen



Notes

Reflection: "On slavery, merciful economics, and divine punishment," Fr. Samuel Torvend

Image: Nelly Bube, "The Unforgiving Servant," n.d.

Opening acclamation: *Enriching Our Worship 1* (New York: Church Publishing, 1998)

Hymn Text: Rosamund Herklots

Collect: *Revised Common Lectionary Prayers* (Nashville: Consultation on Common Texts, 2002; administered by Augsburg Fortress Publishers)

Biblical readings: *The New Revised Common Lectionary* adapted for Episcopal Use, 2006

Gospel reading: *New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible* (Washington, DC: The National Council of Churches, 1989)

Meditation on the Gospel: the Rev. Nadia Bolz Weber in *Sojourners* magazine, September 12, 2011

Prayers: The Anglican Church of Canada, *The Book of Alternative Services 1985*, with revisions

Lord's Prayer: *The Book of Common Prayer, 1979*

Anthem: Text by Lancelot Andrewes; setting by John Rutter; sung by The Paulist Scholars and Singers of the Chapel Royal

Concluding Prayer: *Revised Common Lectionary Prayers* (Nashville: Consultation on Common Texts, 2002; administered by Augsburg Fortress Publishers)

Blessing: *The Book of Common Prayer, 1979*

Thanksgiving at Table: Samuel Pugh, n.d.

Photograph: Gordon Parks, "A family says grace before dinner," 1942