

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

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May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Forgiveness. We've all given it, and we've all needed it. We all know that no one is perfect and that we all make mistakes. Speaking of mistakes, I'm going to take a moment to take a group confession of the audience. This is the time to come clean and to be honest with yourself ...don't worry, the questions aren't that bad! Think of a time when: you have gossiped before? (pause) told a lie before? (pause) have been self-centered or inconsiderate before? (pause) Whether we've done these or other things in our past or in the present, we have all had experiences where we need to be forgiven. Once we are forgiven, we feel the words that we read earlier in the service: "Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sin is put away!" We feel happy, relieved, even joyous when our sins are forgiven. Thinking back to your personal experience, your forgiveness could have come from your parents, friends, family, or even God.

In my younger years, I tended to get in trouble for not telling the truth. When talking to my parents, I would change my story around about why I had not come home on time or why I was not at my friend's house like I said I was. While telling these stories, or white lies, I felt bad, guilty and manipulative because I was lying to my parents when I knew I shouldn't have. I was even confused as to why I was doing it. But, while I weaved the web of my story, keeping my facts as straight as possible without messing up, I realized

the truth would cause major consequences, such as a lengthy groundment or forfeiting of my allowance, etc. I figured instead, that telling my white lie would be safer and I would end up with fewer or not as bad of consequences, **IF** they never found out the truth.

However, to my dismay many-a-time, my parents **DID** find out. Once they did find out, I got the response of “You’re grounded ...for life.” Even though we’ve had our disputes, it was good to know that my parents did not really ground me for life, but always showed me forgiveness, whether I asked for it or not, and loved me no matter what. After having time to reflect on my poor story telling abilities, I’ve found that it is better to be honest in the first place; and it actually feels better to tell the truth, even if it means I will receive punishment. But, if dishonesty does happen, it’s never too late to ask for forgiveness.

We all know how easy it is to make mistakes, whether we gossip, lie to one another, or say rude things, but why is it so hard to ask for forgiveness? I’ve found that shame is one factor that plays a role because we do not want others to know what wrong we have done; at times we don’t even want to admit to God what we’ve done, even though He already knows. In conjunction with shame is pride. Here is where we might think that what we’ve said or done really isn’t a big deal and it won’t really affect us, when in reality, it **DOES** affect us. We don’t want to look weak or be in the wrong, so we don’t confess our mistakes to others. Sometimes, we haven’t even forgiven ourselves. It’s hard to forgive yourself because of shame, pride, or even guilt and you aren’t sure how you can forgive yourself for acting in a way that has hurt others. Once we get past these factors, we have to build up the courage and strength to go to that person and say, “I’m sorry; will you please forgive me?”

Once you are the person who is being asked to forgive, what do you do? Do you forgive and forget? To be honest, it's not always that easy to do. Sometimes, if you know something has been said that hurt you, you may feel angry, sad, frustrated, and even hateful. When playing with the idea of forgiveness of others, it's funny how the feelings that we may feel, like jealousy, envy, anger, or contempt are opposite of the fruits of the spirit, found in Galatians 5 that we are suppose to live by – love, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control. Sometimes it's hard to overcome these human feelings that are not fruits of the Spirit and to say "It's OK; I forgive you." There may be times where we can't forgive someone initially, but over time, it is better to let it go and forgive than to hold in those feelings of contempt.

When looking at today's Gospel lesson about Zacchaeus, we know that he was a sinner, and what made him a sinner was his choice of job: being a chief tax collector. Now, back in those days, tax collectors collected money for Rome. Say Zacchaeus had to collect 10,000 denarii from the city of Jericho, to make Rome happy. What Zacchaeus would do was tax each person 500 denarii so he made plenty of money on the side. This is why tax collectors were disliked immensely and why he was a sinner.

Zacchaeus never felt he needed to ask for forgiveness from the people he taxed or God until the day Jesus came to Jericho and spoke directly to him. Zacchaeus reached a turning point in his life when Jesus, who told him that he was going to go to Zacchaeus's house that day, addressed him. Here is where Zacchaeus finally realizes that what he had been doing was wrong. What does he do about his wrong doings? He says in verse 8, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." He is demonstrating an inward

change of no longer being a sinner because he was forgiven and did an outward action of giving back to those who had less than him, and to those he had wronged.

The other part of the gospel that is interesting is verse seven about the crowd. After Jesus had addressed Zacchaeus about going to his house that day, we read “All who saw it began to grumble and said, ‘He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.’” My first thought when reading this is why does the crowd care so much? But then, when thinking about Zacchaeus and what wrongs he had done toward them via too much taxing, I can understand their grumbling. It also seems like they are holding a grudge against Zacchaeus and refuse to forgive him for his wrongdoings, even if the Lord has forgiven him. What’s interesting about this part of the gospel is how we sometimes react like this to others. For example, it’s like when you work on a group project, but you feel someone doesn’t pull their weight while everyone else seems to be doing more work. We understand that the crowd is mad at Zacchaeus for over-taxing them. Because of his taxing methods, the crowd holds a grudge against Zacchaeus and they don’t understand how, nor do they WANT to forgive him because of how he has treated them. What they really want is revenge, and since they aren’t tax collectors, the only way they can get their revenge is by staying mad at him and not forgiving him. However, they are missing the fact that because Jesus/God Himself has forgiven Zacchaeus in front of them, they should also forgive Zacchaeus. But, they chose to grumble and remain angry with Zacchaeus.

We can give forgiveness to one another, but what happens on a personal level with God? God already knows what sins we have committed without us coming to Him and telling Him, but admitting it to Him can be just as difficult as it is to admit it to the person we

have sinned against. Sometimes when we have sinned, we do not forgive ourselves for that sin. If we can't forgive ourselves for whatever reasons (guilt, pride, etc), we don't allow God to forgive us. However, if we build up our relationship with God through prayer, confession, and repentance, we will be forgiven for our sins because of God's love and His ultimate sacrifice.

The next time you need to be forgiven or need to give forgiveness, think about what this phrase is saying from the Lord's Prayer: "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." What are we really saying here? We are praying to God to not only forgive us for our sins, to forgive but others who have sinned against us. So when you find it hard to forgive others or to ask God for forgiveness, remember your relationship that you build with God through prayer, confession and repentance. It may help you through your situation when you don't know what to do. And don't forget, we all make mistakes and we all need forgiveness. Instead of feeling lost and alone without forgiveness, we should forgive and want to be forgiven because we will then be happy because our sins have been put away!

Please pray with me:

God, you know that we all make mistakes. Help us remember to come to you when we struggle with our sins and those who sin against us. Help us to love each other by forgiving others even when we really don't think they are deserving of our forgiveness. Thank you for forgiving us for our sins and loving us until the end of time. In your name we pray, Amen.

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICE LEARNING TO NEW YORK CITY: Everyone is invited to participate in a service learning trip to Manhattan during interim break. Primary work is in two soup kitchens; public health involvement for nurses and other who are interested is being explored.

Vickie Reiff and Darcy Haas are co-leading the adventure. Questions, call chapel office-5403.

CHAPEL CALENDAR

Sunday (11 th)	Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul
Monday (12 th)	Worship, 10 am - Rich Bowman, Reli.
Tuesday (13 th)	Koinonia, 10 am
Wednesday (14 th)	Holy Communion, 10 am - Reli. 257 Class
Friday (16 th)	Worship, 10 am - Ashley Mercer, Sr. Spkr.
Sunday (18 th)	Worship, 11 am - Pr. Paul
Monday (12 th)	Hymn Sing, 10 am.