

## **The Way of Forgiveness– Sunday June 16<sup>th</sup> 2013.**

***And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)***

Beloved in the Lord,

“There but for the Grace of God go I.” This quote is attributed to John Bradford, who was a preacher in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He is said to have made this statement as he watched a group of condemned criminals being led away to be executed. Later, he himself was executed by Queen Mary who had him burned at the stake for his beliefs in God, on July 15<sup>th</sup> 1555.

Why do I mention this fact on this our 14<sup>th</sup> of June Commemoration? I do so in order for all of us to pause and ponder the truth that is contained in Bradford’s quote: “ There but for the Grace of God, go I.” Before we get carried away condemning others and passing judgement upon those who have harmed us in some way, we need to stop and consider the state of our own heart. What separates you and me from a criminal, from an evil dictator? Nothing but the Grace of God. We are born with a sinful and fallen nature, we are born in sin, separated from God and we all have within us the potential to be evil. There is evil in every heart and under the right set of circumstances it can manifest in horrible ways. Where a heart is not controlled by God, surrendered to Jesus Christ, there is potential for indescribable evil.

As Latvians we know this only too well. June 14 is a constant reminder of what happens under the rule of an evil dictator, that has no regard for God. As we reflect upon the horrors of June 14 we have two paths which we can follow. We can choose to remain in anger, hostility and unforgiveness, and live with bitterness in our hearts or we can choose the path of forgiveness. The choice is ours. The first path will distance us from God and lead to even more evil and harm. The second path leads us closer to God and to His blessings.

In The Lord’s prayer, which we all know, there is a petition that is our text today: “***And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.***”

Many people pray these words, but do not really meditate upon what they mean. As we ask God to forgive our debts or our sins we are also forgiving those who have sinned against us. That is not so easy to do but it is of vital importance. Jesus clearly and unmistakably taught:

***For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” (Matthew 6:14-15)***

Jesus makes it very clear. It may be hard to digest, it may be a struggle, but it is something that we must do. It is vital that we understand this. It is not an option.

There are two very important words here in Jesus statement that we cannot overlook: “If and then.” Jesus said: “For **if** you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But **if** you do not forgive others, **then** your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

If you forgive, then God will forgive you. It is a conditional promise.

I know that this is not an easy thing to do, especially for those of you who are affected by the fact that family members were brutally treated, many deported, many never returned. But by the Grace of God, you must seek His help to forgive so that you may experience true and total freedom in your heart.

I began today with the quote from John Bradford. “There go I, but for the Grace of God.”

If and when we understand the depth of this truth, then it becomes easier to forgive, and to receive freedom.

In Romans we read: ***“<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;” (Romans 3:21-24)***

All of us have sinned and we all fall short of the Glory of God. We all deserve eternal death as punishment for our sin, because the wages of sin is death. But God in His Grace, justifies us, he forgives all our sin, if we turn to Jesus.

The Gospel is very simple and the same for all people:

***“<sup>6</sup> For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. <sup>18</sup> He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)***

When we believe in Jesus Christ, and receive Him into our heart as Lord and Saviour, then at that moment all our sins are forgiven: past present and future. His blood cleanses us from all sin and our names are written in The Lamb’s Book of Life.

Having received forgiveness we are to also forgive. Jesus teaches this to us in the story about two debtors who were not able to pay their debts. We read in Matthews Gospel:

***“<sup>3</sup> For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. <sup>24</sup> When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had,***

***and repayment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'* <sup>27</sup> *And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'* <sup>29</sup> *So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'* <sup>30</sup> *But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. <sup>31</sup> So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. <sup>32</sup> Then summoning him, his lord \*said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'* <sup>34</sup> *And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. <sup>35</sup> My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."* (Matthew 18:23-25)**

I think that the message here is very clear. God forgives us our debt which we cannot pay, and we are to forgive the sins of those who sin against us.

When we do we are free. The problem with the first slave in the story is that he was not willing to forgive the debt his fellow slave owed him, even though he himself had just been relieved of a much greater debt. Unwillingness to forgive is a terrible thing. The way of forgiveness is always the right path.

When we do forgive, we need to remember one very important fact and that is that all men will appear before the judgement seat of God. Nothing will get past Him. Sin will not go unpunished. His judgement is always just and right. There are no mistakes, no errors. Only He can judge righteously so let's leave that to Him. Our job is to forgive and then we too are forgiven. As we do our hearts are clean and we position ourselves to receive the very best from God.

If we find this teaching difficult, if we find it hard to forgive, then let us come to Jesus and ask Him to help. Paul said: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Paul says "All things". Not in his own strength, but relying upon Jesus. Relying upon His strength and power and love. May we never say I cannot or will not forgive, but let us say: "Through Christ my Lord, in His power and love, by His shed blood I choose to forgive all who have sinned against me.

I Choose to forgive as I have been forgiven." May God help us.

Amen. Pastor Colvin S. MacPherson Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sydney.

All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.