

“Godspell”

Theme: The Gospel in Film

Sermon Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40

Family Activity for the Week: Blow up one balloon for each family member. Place them in the center of the room. Invite each family member to choose one along with a marker. Ask each person to draw pictures or write words on the balloons representing something they have done wrong. Read 1 John 1:9 aloud. Explain that this means that no matter what we do, we can tell God we are sorry, and God will forgive us. Begin a time of prayer, asking God to forgive what is written on your balloon. After you have prayed, have each person pop his or her balloon, representing God’s forgiving and forgetting your sin. Thank God for forgiving our sins.

Monday, June 24 – Read Matthew 13:10-17. In *Godspell*, we see the Gospel of Matthew come to life as Jesus interacts with his followers, often using parables. This week, we will focus on the parables that Jesus uses for teaching in Matthew’s gospel. Some people think these verses say Jesus used parables to obscure his message. No—Isaiah 6:9-10, which Jesus quoted, did not say what God wanted, but stated hyperbolically how people were responding. In Isaiah’s and Jesus’ day, some hearers had closed minds. No matter how much they listened, they wouldn’t hear. But Jesus’ parables “stuck,” working away in their hearts and minds toward an “ah-ha” moment of clarity. As they reflected on the stories, those whose hearts were open began to see that God was at work just as prophets and righteous people had dreamed of for centuries.

- Author Michael Green quotes Prof. C. F. D. Moule as saying, “You can’t teach by spoon feeding. You must let people puzzle it out for themselves.” How does this suggest at least one reason Jesus used parables? When have you understood Jesus’ message more deeply by wrestling with some part of it yourself rather than having someone else hand you an answer?
- There was nothing arbitrary about Jesus’ saying that “those who have will receive more ... as for those who don’t have, even the little they have will be taken away from them” (verse 12). Muscles that are used grow; left idle, they wither away. In what ways have you found yourself “receiving more” as you intentionally develop your spiritual “muscles”?

Prayer: *Jesus, you came to bring light and life. Guide me as I continue learning how to live into the life you offer, how to stretch myself and grow in the atmosphere of your grace. Amen.*

Tuesday, June 25 – Read Matthew 18:15-21. In these verses, Jesus looked ahead to when his followers would live and worship in assemblies (or “churches”). He said they needed to deal with hurts and failures through forgiveness and reconciliation. Even if people didn’t want to reconcile, Jesus did not prescribe “shunning,” for he himself often reached out to “Gentiles and tax collectors,” after all. His approach was so different that Peter asked how many times it had to be followed.

- Pastor and scholar N. T. Wright noted, “Forgiveness doesn’t mean saying ‘it didn’t really happen’ or ‘it didn’t really matter’. In either of those cases, you don’t need forgiveness; you just need to clear up a misunderstanding. Forgiveness is when it did happen, and it did matter, and you’re going to deal with it and end up loving and accepting one another again anyway.” What makes evasion or dishonesty about conflict so often feel “easier” to us? When have you experienced the joy of honest, hard-won reconciliation?
- Is there a sense in which you think Peter was raising a legitimate concern? How can you tell the difference between a person who is abusing a relationship, who seems to have no intention of allowing “forgiveness” to change what’s hurtful, and one who is honestly seeking forgiveness, even for a repeat offense?

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for being realistic and honest about the fact that we will all mess up, and need forgiveness from you and one another. Keep me forgiving as well as forgiven. Amen.*

Wednesday, June 26 – Read Matthew 18:21-27. Some rabbis taught that any given sin could only be forgiven three times, so Peter may have thought that stretching that to seven times was generous. But Jesus had something much bigger in mind. His parable made the servant’s debt a whopper, an amount equivalent to 60 million days’ wages! (That’s about 170,000 years of work.) In his story, the king (he pretty clearly meant God) showed mercy even to a person who owed that kind of debt.

- So we don’t think all we need is a tally sheet that goes up to 77 or 490, commentator Craig Keener noted, “Seventy times seven (some interpreters read seventy-seven) does not really mean exactly 490 here; it is a typically graphic Jewish way of saying ‘Never hold grudges.’” How hard do you find it to let go of wrongs done to you? How does your idea of God need to change so that you can reorient your human tendency to hold grudges?
- In Jesus’ parable, the servant owed a debt so absurdly large that in human dealings no one could possibly owe that much. Do you think Jesus intended that the parable make us aware of the gap between our purity and God’s, and make us aware of our need for a Savior to bridge the gap? Is that a good image, or are we not actually all that bad?

(Message Notes and Meditation Moments for June 22-23, 2019 – For more, go to www.fumcdurango.org)

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, as this story reminds me how much you've done to give me eternal life, I offer you praise from the depths of my heart! Thank you for your love and forgiveness. Amen.*

Thursday, June 27 – Read Matthew 18:28-35. With his enormous debt forgiven, Jesus said, the servant breathed a huge sigh of relief, and then spotted someone who owed him about 100 days' wages. He demanded payment on the spot, and when that debtor pleaded for mercy, he refused and had the man imprisoned. His attitude and his actions made it clear that he didn't understand, or truly value, the mercy the king had showed to him.

- Have you ever been in a situation where you or another person received mercy and forgiveness, yet found it hard to extend that to another person? What inner factors too often make that characteristic of us as humans? How can taking in God's forgiveness over time transform us so that we can forgive others as we have been forgiven?
- Sometimes it bothers us that Jesus seemed to say God will not forgive us unless we forgive others. Pastor Myron Augsburg noted, "This is not a legalism, but states the expectation of responsible persons whose moral sense of responsibility will call them to express the forgiveness towards others that they have experienced from God." In what ways does God's generosity in forgiving and restoring you change how you see yourself, and prompt you to be generous toward others who have wronged you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you gave up so much in order to reach me with your forgiveness. Help me to accept and value that gift, and to be more forgiving toward myself and others in my life. Amen.*

Friday, June 28 - Read Matthew 25:1-13. Middle Eastern weddings went on for days. Jesus' story pictured the bridegroom arriving at the main feast much later than expected (perhaps delayed celebrating with other friends). Five bridesmaids had extra oil, to keep their lamps lit in case of a delay. But five hadn't prepared and missed the feast as they tried to borrow or buy oil at the last minute. As in the story of the household servants, Jesus' was saying that the point of life is to serve God steadily every day, not leaving preparation for the last minute.

- In this parable Jesus taught that some things cannot be done at the last minute. When exam day comes, it's too late to start studying for the exam. As you read this parable, did you identify more with the prepared or the unprepared bridesmaids? What steps can you take each day so that, like the prepared bridesmaids, you will be at the "wedding banquet of the Lamb" (see Revelation 19:1-9)?
- The parable also said some things cannot be borrowed. Have you ever wished you could "borrow" the connection your pious grandmother or your preacher has with God? Doesn't work. God wants a love relationship with us, and we build those relationships by our own involvement with the other person. In what ways are you building your personal connection with God each day?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for inviting me to be a part of your "wedding feast." Help me to value that privilege highly, and to stay connected with you every day. Amen.*

Saturday, June 29 – Read Matthew 25:31-46. Scholar William Barclay told this story: Martin of Tours was a Roman soldier, and a Christian. One winter day, Martin met a beggar who was blue and shivering with cold. Martin took his worn and frayed soldier's coat, cut it in two, and gave half of it to the beggar. That night he had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and Jesus in the midst of all the angels. Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. An angel asked, "Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak?" And Jesus answered softly, "My servant Martin gave it to me."

- In this parable, note that both "the sheep" and "the goats" were surprised at what "the king" told them. The goats' question (verse 44) suggests a feeling that "if we'd known it was you, of course we'd have helped." In other words, the hungry, hurting, outcast people they did see weren't worth helping. What can help you learn to see the face of Jesus in the faces of the people you meet? When have you found the kind of freedom and joy that comes from blessing others because it's the "God thing" to do?

Prayer: *Dear God, I'm sorry when I've turned away from you, not recognizing you in the unlovely, unlovable people I saw. Fill me with your love. By your grace may I bless you by blessing those I otherwise would not love. Amen.*