

## PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

### Notes from Rodney L. Barbour

### March 21, 2010

**Theme:** Pastor Alan writes: *Through the centuries, the Lord's Prayer has stood as a secure lighthouse in the midst of turbulent times, and a rock upon which we can build our lives. Simple enough for a child to memorize, it is profound enough to build one's life philosophy around. During the six weeks leading up and concluding the Sunday following Easter, we'll look at each of six petitions in depth to learn what we can about our Lord's Prayer. Today's focus will be on the phrase "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors".*

**Preparation for Worship:** During today's worship, we will explore and 'practice' the concepts of forgiveness and mercy. The choir will help us get started by singing the amazing hymn writer Charles Wesley's text: *Depth of Mercy*. Here's a portion of the verse: *"I have long withstood His grace, long provoked Him to His face, would not hearken to His calls, grieved Him by a thousand falls. I my Master have denied, I afresh have crucified, oft profaned His hallowed name, put Him to an open shame"*. At the end, this arranger introduces a second hymn melody: *"I surrender all, all to thee my blessed Savior, I surrender all"*. This will be one of the most beautiful anthems the choir will sing this season.

**Call to Worship:** *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoso believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!* (John 3:16) We come today to give thanks and praise the Redeemer, covenant God, the Father of mercies, God, our peace. These words call us to worship:

Leader: We give thanks to you, God our Father, for mercy that reaches out, for patience that waits our returning, for your love that is ever ready to welcome sinners.

**People: We praise you that in Jesus Christ you came to us with forgiveness, and that, by your Holy Spirit, you move us to repent and receive your love.**

Leader: Though we are sinners, you are faithful and worthy of all praise.

**People: We praise you, great God, in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

**Hymn of Praise:** We continue our praise to God for the many acts of mercy and forgiveness he has bestowed on us through his creation and his Son Jesus Christ. These words are set to a familiar melody. Join gladly as the organ and choir lead.

Vs1

**Give to our God immortal praise; mercy and truth are all his ways;  
Wonders of grace to God belong; repeat his mercies in your song.**

Vs2

**He built the earth, he spread the sky, and fixed the starry lights on high;  
Wonders of grace to God belong; repeat his mercies in your song.**

Vs3

**He fills the sun with morning light; he bids the moon direct the night;  
His mercies ever shall endure, when suns and moons shall shine no more.**

**Vs4**

**He sent His Son with power to save from guilt and darkness and the grave;  
Wonders of grace to God belong; repeat his mercies in your song.**

**Vs5**

**Through this vast world he guides our feet, and leads us to his heavenly seat;  
His mercies ever shall endure, when this our world shall be no more.**

**Confession and Pardon:** Jesus gives a startling warning about forgiveness: if we refuse to forgive others, he will also refuse to forgive us. Why? When we don't forgive others, we are denying our common ground as sinners in need of God's forgiveness. God's forgiveness of sin is not the direct result of our forgiving others, but it is based on our realizing what forgiveness mean (see Ephesians 4:32) How forgiven would you be if God's forgiveness were based on the way you forgive others? It is easy to ask God for forgiveness, but difficult to grant it to others. Whenever we ask God to forgive us for sin, we should ask ourselves. "Have I forgiven the people who have hurt or wronged me?" This morning we have the opportunity through these words to practice this teaching as we join together to confess our sins:

Leader: Lord, we are assured in Your Word that "judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful."

**People: But if we forgive others when they sin against us, then you will forgive us as well.**

Leader: For in the same way we judge others, we will be judged, and with the measure we use, it will be measured to us.

**People: So, Lord, right now we release into your hands those who have done us wrong. We open the door of the debtor's prison we have held them in, and we set them free.**

Leader: And we ask in Jesus' name, that you will set us free from the torment of bitterness and unforgiveness.

**People: Lord, help us to walk away in freedom and to never look back.**

Jesus hears our prayers and offers his grace and restoration to each one who is truly repentant. We must now accept his forgiveness and move forward in Jesus' power and will.

Leader: Live as one who has been forgiven! Walk with joy to know your debts are paid. Know your name is clear before your Father; Know you are his child, and do not be afraid.

**People: Thanks be to God for his gift of grace through Jesus Christ!**

**Scripture/Sermon:** Take time before Sunday to read Matthew 18:21-35. The rabbis taught that Jews should forgive those who offend them three times. Peter asked Jesus if seven (the "perfect" number) was enough times to forgive someone. Jesus answered, "Seventy time seven," meaning that we shouldn't keep track of how many times we forgive someone. We should always forgive those who are truly repentant, no matter how many times they ask. Because God has forgiven all our sins, we should not withhold forgiveness from others. Realizing how completely Christ has forgiven us should produce a free and generous attitude of forgiveness toward others. When we don't forgive others, we are setting ourselves outside and above Christ's law of love.

**Song of Response:** Today's final hymn is set to the familiar and powerful music by the Belgian composer Jean Sibelius entitled "Finlandia". These words are a positive confession and support today's teaching. The power of their truth is reflected in the music. Don't just stand back and listen today! Join whole-heartedly in singing the mighty truth of God's word as you prepare to "march" into the world as forgiving and forgiven people!

***I Then Shall Live***

***Vs1***

***I then shall live as one who's been forgiven;  
I'll walk with joy to know my debts are paid.  
I know my name is clear before my father;  
I am his child, and I am not afraid.  
So greatly pardoned, I'll forgive another;  
the law of love I gladly will obey.***

***Vs2***

***I then shall live as one who's learned compassion;  
I've been so loved that I'll risk loving too.  
I know how fear builds walls instead of bridges;  
I dare to see another's point of view.  
And when relationships demand commitment,  
then I'll be there to care and follow through.***

***Vs3***

***Your kingdom come around and through and in me,  
your power and glory, let them shine through me;  
Your hallowed name, O may I bear with honor,  
and may your living Kingdom come in me.  
The Bread of Life, O may I share with honor,  
and may you feed a hungry world through me.***

***See you in worship this Sunday!***