

Matthew 6:9-15
Saint Paul's Parish
8 March 2026

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.

In nomine...

I want to begin this morning by asking for your forgiveness my siblings in Christ Jesus. Not for my sermon being shorter than intended, though that is true. My mother is in hospital in Indianapolis and some of the time that I had set aside for writing was spent driving. No, I want to ask your forgiveness for being a little grumpy. This is my least favorite day of the year. Like why? Why are we still messing about with this time change nonsense? Why do we deliver ourselves into the tyrannous hands of evening people, while we morning people are forced to labor on in the dark? The only thing that brings me less joy, is the thought of permanently being on Daylight Savings Time. Ok. I feel better. Moving on.

We continue our sermon series on the Lord's Prayer this morning with perhaps the most inconsistently translated petition.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Is it sins? Or trespasses? Or debts? The Greek work *opheilēma* is only used twice in the New Testament, once in Matthew's Gospel when Jesus gives the prayer and again in Saint Paul's letter to the Romans

“Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due.” The something due is our word *opheilēma*, which we can see as rather easily being translated into debts. So how do we end up with sins and / or trespasses? When we look at Luke’s text, we see that he uses the Greek word *hamartia*, which is rather clearly translated sin or sins. Here we have our answer.

And while there are moments when deep textual cross-referencing could and should continue for some time – this is not one of those moments. In our Book of Common Prayer this petition is traditionally translated “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”, while the more *modern* translation offered is “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” And I do not think that we have too much difficulty discerning the similarities here. But we may find ourselves asking what is sin? Perhaps that is where we should begin.

Sin is a difficult concept to the modern mind. We have been told that many things are sins, and we know that many of those things are just people’s opinions. Which is honestly a decent window into sin, sin takes root when we are too concerned with our own thoughts and beliefs rather than grounding ourselves in the truth of Jesus Christ. The catechism of the Episcopal Church defines sin in this way, “Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.”¹

¹ BCP pg. 848.

To paraphrase sin is anything that separates us from God, neighbor, or creation. Which could be a pretty big list. When we begin to think of sin as the distortion of relationships, we begin to see sin all around us, it can become a little overwhelming. I think that is what why we tend to define sin in rather narrow ways. Murder. Adultery. Lying. Stealing. These are sins. The Church catholic has widely accepted the concept of the seven deadly sins since the sixth century; pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth. Though in the social media age pride is what it takes to go viral. Gluttony manifests in our setting aside of fasting as a spiritual practice. And wrath... well war is good for those in power, so we probably shouldn't resist too much.

When we reframe sin as the distortion of relationship, we will begin to see the need for forgiveness at every corner. We need forgiveness for all the distortion that we bring to the world. The disharmony that we cause through gossip and lying. The disunity we bring through our refusal to tear down the walls that separate us from the fullness of the rainbow people of God. And when we become more aware of our need for forgiveness, we will grow more willing to forgive those who have wronged us. Not because it doesn't hurt, not because what they did to us hasn't changed us, not because we are being Pollyanna – because when we forgive, we do what Jesus asks us to do. And when our motivation is following Jesus, the rest of it will begin to fall into place.

When we pray, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, we should do so with the expectation of bringing healing and wholeness to our lives and the hope that we will bring healing and wholeness to our world. We are living in an incredibly immoral age. Where norms are disregarded and order is being torn down at an alarming rate. Yet this petition can be the springboard for our mission in the world. We can be agents of mercy and forgiveness. We can be agents of faith, hope, and love. We can be agents of truth in a post-truth society.

When we commit ourselves to the work of receiving and offering forgiveness, we commit ourselves to the work of Jesus Christ and that work will never falter. That work will never lead us astray. That work will change not only our lives, but the whole world. This afternoon carve out some time and go for a walk or sit in silence – use this time to examine the places in your lives where your relationships are distorted. Your relationship with God. Your relationship with your neighbor. Your relationship with creation. Ask for forgiveness. Offer forgiveness. Know that your Creator seeks you always and is constantly calling you back into perfect relationship. Trust in that grace and then offer that grace to all whom you meet.

Now with boldness let us pray,

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.