



NEW MILFORD UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



You are invited to worship with us in the quiet of prayer, in the joy of song, and in the desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ. Part of our mission is to be a place for all people. All are welcome here! Whatever your gender identity, age, race, religious background, economic status, sexual orientation or condition of ableness, we greet you as a beloved child of God.





* **The order of service is** subject to change at the leading of **the Holy Spirit.**

Italicized Bold print invites congregational response in unison.

† Means you are **invited to stand** if able and comfortable.

Please invite your friends to join our worship services on Facebook & share our livestream.

ENTRANCE & PRAISE

🎵 **Prelude**

musical selection by Tim Smith, Music Director

☀️ **Welcome & Announcements**

The Rev. Alex da Silva Souto

🎵 **Centering Hum**

“Lord, Prepare Me To Be A Sanctuary”

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living
Sanctuary for You”

† **Call to Worship**

Today we remember a long-ago conversation
when Peter asked a question and Jesus answered:

“When someone sins against you,
forgive them seventy-seven times.”

Did Peter go on to ask, like so many of us have,

“But Jesus, how do we forgive
when so much seems unforgivable?

But Jesus, why should we forgive
when so much injustice still persists?”

May we dare to follow Jesus like Peter did,
deep into the heart of these hard questions.

And in the journey, may we find
justice that is loving,

forgiveness that is liberating,
and mercy that is healing. **Amen.**

🙏 **Prayer of Invocation**

Gracious God, who comes alongside us in the highs and lows of life,
guide us now into questions that open up new possibilities and new life.

Take us deeper into our faith, beyond the cliches and platitudes and sayings,
and lead us into the mystery of your perfect love that casts out fear
and your generous heart that delights in justice and joy for all creation.

Teach us what forgiveness really means, and remind us that in you, our God,
we all find forgiveness, liberating love, and an endless invitation to try again. Amen.

PROCLAMATION & RESPONSE

Prayer for Illumination

**Through the words of Your Child Jesus Christ
and through all the words we share today,
may You awaken our hearts, oh God,
that we may know Your pardoning grace.
May You strengthen our hearts, oh God,
that we may forgive others and forgive ourselves
as we strive together for justice and joy for all creation. Amen.**

²¹ Then Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³ For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my Heavenly Parent will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your sibling from your heart."

The word of God for all who chose to receive it. **Thanks be to God!**

Listening for God's Message

"When Forgiveness Doesn't Come Easy"

Pastor Sophy

Sermon reflection questions and notes:

What does it mean to forgive someone "seventy-seven times"?

- In the Biblical tradition, seven is the number of completion, so seventy-seven suggests that we are meant to forgive people completely in all things.

But what happens when forgiveness is difficult? When someone does something that seems too terrible to forgive? Does forgiving someone mean letting them off the hook for terrible deeds? What about social injustices like racism or sexism or homophobia?

- Forgiveness is only authentic when it isn't coerced— no one can make you forgive someone. Forgiveness must come from your own heart. No one should manipulate you into forgiving them so that they can get away from bad behavior.
- Forgiveness is more for the one who is wronged than the one who wronged. When we forgive, it frees us from hatred or resentment of the people who hurt us. Hatred traps us, but God calls us to be free. Once freed from that hatred, we can approach the relationship from a position of radical love for ourselves and others. We can decide whether we want to repair the relationship or set healthy holy boundaries between us and those who have hurt us.

Who does the "king" represent in the parable Jesus told his disciples? Who does the slave represent? Who are the other slaves meant to represent?

Verses 34-35 are pretty bleak. How can we interpret these verses in a way that makes sense to us?

- What if the "torture" to which the lord subjects his slave isn't about hellfire and brimstone, but is instead about the inner torment that we feel when we dwell in hatred and resentment against those who have hurt us?

Prayers of the People

Holy One, we lift up to You now all of our joys and delights, sorrows and fears.

We lift up to You all our questions, our doubts, and our holy moral wrestling.

We lift up to You all the times we have hurt others and been hurt by others.

We lift up fierce cries for justice and deep yearnings for love.

We name all of this and voice all of this and pray all of this

as a sacred offering to You and to one another.

[You are invited to share your prayers in the chat or aloud]

Holy One, You hear our cries and You cry with us.

You see us dancing and You dance with us.

You council us in our confusion and You lead us into freedom.

Hear our prayers and strengthen us

as we join together in the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Our Father/Mother/Creator, 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. Do not let us fall into temptation,

but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Invitation to Offering [© enfleshed] **Please** consider making an offering online <https://bit.ly/NMUMCGive>

Offering of Tithes and Gifts

Musical Selection by Tim Smith



Prayer of Dedication [© enfleshed]

Lynn Hayes Sept 09

Dorothy Stone Sept 12

Thomas Burns Sept 13

Madelyn Malinowski Sept 15

Hunter Scott Barron Sept 16

Barbara Williams Sept 16

Allison Bull Sept 18

Joanna Ihlo Sept 19

Gwenavere Noto Sept 20

Larry Tripp Sept 23

Kyle Poeti Sept 23

Holy One, may the gifts we bring to You and to one another be a reminder of our interwoven and shared life. May we remember that Your holy love extends as a free gift to each of us, and it is our joyful and solemn responsibility to pass that love along throughout all creation.

And so for every moment we have been held in Your love,

and for every moment when You've taught us to share that love with others, we give You thanks.

GOING FORTH

Postlude

musical selection by Tim Smith



Commission & Benediction [adapted from © enfleshed]

Beloveds, hear this good news:

***The forgiveness God call us to is not
the blind acceptance of injustice or unkindness.***

Rather, we are called to forgive

***so that we may be freed from hatred or resentment
and restored to ourselves and to our God.***

Go out from this time and this place

with blessings for the days when forgiveness is difficult

and with peace in the knowledge that

true forgiveness leads us into freedom and joy. Amen.



Go now in peace to love God and one another.





"Woman Asking God for Wisdom",
David Ayibiowu Olusola

The Prophet Miriam St. Edmundsbury Cathedral
Bury St. Edmonds, England

Artwork: cover collage by Pastor Alex from images: "Reconciliation", Josephina Vasconcellos, Coventry Cathedral, Coventry, England; and "Merciful Mother" multimedia.

Note: Deep gratitude to our volunteers and staff members who make our worship online and in person possible, and to our congregants whose continued efforts help to keep our community safe from Covid19. We lift up gratitude for the collaboration involved in making this worship service happen for the glory of God and the delight of Creation.

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