

GOSPEL MESSAGE

September 13, 2026

LECTIONARY 24

Forgiven and Freed

Today's gospel reading is all about forgiveness. In the complex web of human relationships, forgiveness often feels messy. We may not understand it, and it may at times feel entirely out of reach. Yet, as Christians, we are called to wrestle with the promise that even when forgiveness feels impossible, there is room for us and for others in the wideness of God's mercy. How do we make sense of this?

We might begin by experiencing God's forgiveness ourselves. Many worshiping communities begin the service with a time of confession and forgiveness. Together we name out loud the ways we have failed to love God and neighbor, the ways we have failed to recognize ourselves or one another as beloved children of God. We name how we have been complacent in systems of injustice, how we have harmed one another directly, and the hurtful things we don't even know we've done.

This practice may seem deeply unsettling; after all, where else do we greet each other with a list of all the things we've done wrong? But confession is also freeing. It gives us permission to stop pretending we have it all together. It allows us to shed the weight of our mistakes and lay down our burdens so our hands and hearts are ready to receive God's mercy.

And then, week after week, we hear God's words of forgiveness for us and for our neighbors. We are reminded that there is always and forever enough of God's grace and forgiveness to go around. The public declaration of our forgiveness frees us to enter into the rest of our worship service with open and grateful hearts. And then God's forgiveness sends us out in the world to practice the hard work of forgiving others and receiving their forgiveness in turn, knowing that God will meet us again and again with mercy and grace.

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