

## Forgive us our Trespasses

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

Aren't we supposed to be one? One Body? One Body in Christ? Aren't we all human beings? One human family? All Children of God? Why can't we just admit that we're all the same and stop focusing on what separates us?

On the surface, this seems like the ideal – that we would focus on our similarities instead of our differences – and yet, this line of questions comes not from love but from the sin of placing ourselves onto the Throne of God! Anyone who ever proposes that we all be the same has in mind that everyone would look, act, talk, dress, eat, and in every way be like them (even if they don't freely admit to it!). If we were truly to be all the same, then all other ways of being would be erased, sacrificed, discarded so that everyone could conform to the new normal. This entirely confuses the good ideal of unity with the broken evil of uniformity and it must be rejected in all its forms.

As for reasons why it must be rejected, look no further than the Lord's Prayer. Especially in the version attributed to Matthew, otherwise known as the traditional version, the line, "forgive us our trespasses and we forgive those who trespass against us" subtly hides an underlying truth. To trespass is to violate a boundary, to cross over a border, into someone else's territory without invitation and in a way that is unwelcomed by the owner of the territory whose border has been crossed. This could be a border around land; but, it could also be around time or personal space or anything that a person needs to set a boundary around. And we beg for forgiveness for all of the times when we have violated someone else's healthy boundaries; and, we pray that we would forgive such trespasses across our own boundaries as readily as we hope God will do for us. And there it is – borders, boundaries, differentiation is so important that to violate it is a sin for which forgiveness must be sought. As finite beings, bound by time, space, and our own physical bodies, we need to have boundaries. Having such boundaries is so fundamental to living an abundant life that Jesus included the need for these boundaries, and the importance of respecting them, into his teaching that we call the Lord's Prayer.

To be clear, not all boundaries are good. The healthy ones include differentiation by identity when such labels are freely adopted by people without fear of repercussions. When it becomes a helpful and healthy marker to claim being Asian, African, European, Native American, or of any other family origin; when it is truly safe to claim the truth of being gay, lesbian, straight, bi, or any other sexual orientation that fits your identity; and the same goes for gender identity and being cis, trans, nonbinary, or any point along the spectrum. This is when division is good, God-given, and true. And this is known by the fruits it produces to claim these labels: When LGBTQ+ people are safe and accepted when naming their true identity, suicide rates, and rates of self-harm, go down. When people of all races are truly considered equal and valued, creativity increases, poverty decreases, the world is a better place. These are the grapes of a vineyard well planted. But, if a boundary is not healthy, then what grows within it will be poison berries, a far better translation that "wild grapes" for that word in today's reading from Isaiah. Such borders need to be torn down so that nature can once again take hold and undo the evil work of spreading poison berries.

Where then, did this pattern of diversity being the strength of unity come from? How do we know if we are truly producing grapes or if we are planting poison berries? As Christians, we have come to know God as Trinity – as three Persons in One God and as One God in three Persons. This is the pattern for knowing how to live in unity. If it looks like God, then it is good, and holy, and is the pattern that we are meant to follow. The three Persons of the Trinity are perfectly differentiated, completely unique, and celebrated for Their individuality; and yet, they are so bound, co-eternally, in love, that They are One God, indivisible, inseparable, in perfect unity without any of the Three

demanding uniformity of the Other Two. And we are made in this Divine pattern; we are called to bring forth a world that looks as much like this Triune pattern as we can.

Our own Anglican Communion recently demonstrated exactly this. Every ten years, pandemics notwithstanding, all of the true Anglican and Episcopal Bishops throughout the world are invited to Lambeth Palace, in Canterbury, England, for a Conference. This Lambeth Conference occurred just within the last few weeks, delayed for a few years because of COVID, and someone tried to sabotage the meeting from the start. Someone was able to insert a document into the packet that would have required all Bishops to affirm a statement that would deny the holiness seen in the lives of LGBTQ+ Christians in many parts of the world. This statement required Bishops to deny the goodness that so many have seen in the lives of transgender people. The saboteur tried to force a statement of uniformity upon the Anglican Communion. Instead, the Archbishop of Canterbury responded with exactly the right message: as Anglicans, we are not one Church but a Communion of Churches. We do not have a single Pope to enforce uniformity upon all Anglicans; each member Province gets to establish its own boundaries, its own unique way of being, within their Province. What gives us unity is our shared history, our common prayer, our desire to remain in Communion, and our sincere belief that we are stronger in our diversity than we would ever be if we were forced into uniformity. And so we must seek forgiveness for those times when we have trespassed upon another member of the Anglican Communion, attempting to impose our culture, our norms, upon a people beyond our boundaries; and we must be ready to forgive those who have violated our own boundaries. Acknowledging that there is a profound difference of understanding when it comes to the beauty in the diversity of human sexuality and gender identity across the Anglican Communion, but still walking together in Communion, is the very nature of God lived out in the world. What a gift! What an example!

This is the division that Jesus has come to bring. It is not easy, it is not easy to maintain if we get there, it is not easy to accept the need for this diversity. And so, families will be torn apart – those who celebrate diversity know the power of its unity; and, those who seek uniformity, and the imposition of power and control upon others, will know the dull reality of a life limited to the small dreams of a single subsection of God's people. This, though, is not just a question of being right. It's a question of whether we are willing to bring forth the Reign of God, that Reign that is patterned after the Trinity in Their own Diversity and Unity; or, if, instead, we are going to work for a world that looks like one version of humanity, that is devoid of the beautiful rainbow of humanity, that falls far short of God's dream for all Creation. If we are to work for a world that looks like God, if we understand what the costs might be to our families and friendships, if we are ready to reaffirm our commitment to the movement that Jesus is calling us to, then we must begin by establishing our own healthy boundaries. And then, we must be serious about begging for forgiveness when we trespass against someone else's boundaries and always be ready to forgive when our boundaries are trespassed. Amen.

~The Rev. Dr. Derek J. Quinn, Deacon