

## 9.13.2026 Mighty Rescue, Merciful Lord

Theme: God rescues us by grace. Because He alone is Lord and Judge, He gives us the astonishing freedom to stop judging our neighbor, to welcome one another in Christ, and to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Scripture Focus: Exodus 14:19–31, Psalm 114, Romans 14:1–12, Matthew 18:21–35

### Summary

These four passages belong together in a wonderful way. In Exodus, Israel is trapped between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army. God Himself moves between them and their enemies, opens the sea, and leads His people through on dry ground. Psalm 114 remembers that deliverance in poetic worship: the sea sees God and flees, the mountains skip like rams, and the earth trembles at the presence of the Lord.

Romans 14 applies that reality to the church. Since the Lord is God of all and all believers belong to Him, Christians are not permitted to judge one another over matters of conscience. The Lord is able to make His servant stand. Then in Matthew 18, Jesus tells a parable about a man who was forgiven an unpayable debt but refused to forgive a much smaller debt owed to him. He is handed over to the jailers because he would not let mercy change his heart.

Together these readings form one powerful message: salvation and judgment belong to God alone. And when we receive His mercy, He calls us to become mercy—especially toward one another.

### Key Points

#### 1. The Crossing of the Red Sea: Salvation Is God's Work Alone

In Exodus 14, Israel does not save herself. She has no army, no strategy, no escape route. She can only cry out in fear. Moses tells the people:

> “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today” (Exodus 14:13).

Then God does something only God can do: He places His angel and the pillar of cloud between Israel and Egypt. The cloud gives light to Israel and darkness to her enemies. Moses stretches out his hand, but it is God who drives back the sea with a strong east wind. The waters become walls on the right and on the left. Israel walks through on dry ground. When the Egyptians follow, God throws them into confusion, tangles their chariot wheels, and the sea returns. Not one Egyptian soldier survives.

This is the pattern of the gospel. We cannot save ourselves from sin, death, and the devil. Like Israel, we are trapped. But God makes a way where there is no way. He did this completely in Jesus Christ, who passed through the waters of death and rose again. In Holy Baptism, God drowns the old Adam and raises us to new life. Israel's crossing of the Red Sea is not merely history—it is a picture of baptismal rescue.

Psalm 114 is the natural response to such a rescue: awe and worship. The creatures of the world obey their Creator:

> “Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob” (Psalm 114:7).

The same God who parts seas also turns rock into a pool of water. He is the Lord of every impossible situation. Therefore we do not trust in our own strength, but in His.

## 2. The Lord Is the Judge of All—So We Can Stop Judging Others

Romans 14 finds Paul dealing with a church where Christians disagree about food, holy days, and other matters of conscience. Some are “weak in faith,” and some are “strong.” The weak are not to judge the strong. The strong are not to despise the weak. Both belong to the same Lord.

Paul asks a pointed question:

> “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:4).

This is liberating. When I judge another Christian, I am treating that person as though I were their master and judge. But Jesus Christ is their Lord. He died and lived again to be Lord of both the living and the dead. He alone sits on the judgment seat.

This does not mean that God's Word is silent about sin or that the church should never practice discipline. But in matters where Scripture does not speak clearly—food, drink, days, worship preferences, and other “disputable matters”—we are to welcome one another. The church is not a club of people who all have the same opinions. It is the family of those rescued by the same God, held in the same hand, and destined for the same judgment seat.

## 3. Forgiven to Forgive: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Peter asks Jesus:

> “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” (Matthew 18:21).

Jesus answers: “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22). In other words, forgiveness does not keep score.

Then Jesus tells a parable. A king settles accounts with his servant, who owes ten thousand talents—an impossible, infinite-like debt. The servant cannot pay. He begs for patience. But the king does more than give him time; he cancels the entire debt. He forgives him completely.

The servant leaves, finds a fellow servant who owes him one hundred denarii—a small amount, perhaps one hundred days’ wages—and demands payment. When the man begs for patience, the forgiven servant refuses. He throws him in prison.

When the king hears about it, he calls the servant “wicked.” He says:

> “I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” (Matthew 18:32–33).

Then he hands him over to the tormentors.

Notice the order. The king does not say, “First forgive your fellow servant, and then I will forgive you.” He forgives first. The gospel comes before the command. God’s mercy in Christ is the source of all Christian forgiveness. But if a person truly receives that mercy, it changes the heart. A forgiven person becomes a forgiving person.

This parable is both Gospel and Law. The Gospel is that God forgives an unpayable debt through Christ. The Law is that an unforgiving heart reveals that God’s mercy has not actually taken root. Lutherans call this a “fruit of faith” rather than a condition for salvation. We are not saved by forgiving. But a heart saved by grace will want to forgive, because it knows how much it has been forgiven.

## Questions for Reflection and Study

### Exodus 14 and Psalm 114

1. Have you ever felt trapped “between the enemy and the sea”—with no way out? What did you do, and what did you learn about God’s help?
2. God placed the cloud between Israel and Egypt. How does Jesus Christ stand between you and the enemies of sin and death?
3. What does it mean to “stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord” in your daily life? Is that harder than trying to fix everything yourself?
4. Psalm 114 says the sea flees and the mountains skip at the presence of God. What “mountains” in your life need to bow before His presence?

## Romans 14

1. What “disputable matters” tend to cause Christians to judge one another today? How is the church like the Roman church?
2. Why is it wrong to judge another person’s servant? In what ways do we act as though other Christians are accountable to us rather than to Christ?
3. Paul says, “The Lord is able to make him stand.” How does that word of grace give you confidence—both for yourself and for brothers and sisters whose faith looks different from yours?
4. How does remembering that “Christ died and lived again” shape how you treat Christians you disagree with?

## Matthew 18

1. What does “seventy times seven” look like in a real relationship? Are there people you are still counting offenses against?
2. Why is the contrast between 10,000 talents and 100 denarii so important? How does your own sin against God compare to the sins of others against you?
3. The king forgave the servant first, and only then called him to mercy. How does this order prevent forgiveness from becoming just another “work”?
4. Jesus says the merciful king hands the unforgiving servant over to the tormentors. How should this warning drive us back to the cross, where we are forgiven and made new?
5. “Forgive from your heart” is hard. What do you think forgiveness from the heart does and does not mean?

## Application

This week, try one or more of the following practices:

### 1. Make a Two-Column “Debt Chart”

On one side write: \*\*\*“My debt before God.”\*\*\* You may not need to write every sin—just let the weight of it be represented by the ten thousand talents. Let it drive you to Jesus, who paid that debt on the cross.

On the other side write: \*\*\*“What others owe me.”\*\*\* List the names and offenses you are holding. Compare the two lists honestly. Then ask the Holy Spirit to show you where unforgiveness has taken root.

## 2. Cancel a Debt

Prayerfully choose one person you need to forgive. Write down the offense on a piece of paper. Then, as a visible act, write across it: **“Canceled in Christ.”** You may tear up the paper or burn it. This does not mean you pretend the wrong did not happen. It means you are releasing the right to revenge and entrusting judgment to God.

> **A Note of Caution:** If you have suffered abuse, forgiveness does not mean returning to danger or pretending the sin was not serious. Forgiveness is giving up your right to vengeance. Reconciliation may require repentance, and Godly justice may require boundaries. Trusted pastors, counselors, and authorities can help you walk through this in safety.

## 3. Pray for Someone Who Has Hurt You

Jesus says to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Choose one person who has hurt you, and pray for them every day this week. You do not have to feel warm toward them. Simply say:

> **“Lord, you have forgiven me. Give me Your heart for this person. Bless them and lead them in Your ways.”**

## 4. Practice Not Judging

The next time you are tempted to criticize or dismiss a fellow Christian over a matter of conscience, stop and say to yourself:

> **“They are the Lord’s servant. It is before their own Master that they stand or fall. The Lord is able to make them stand.”**

Speak only what builds up.

## 5. Return to the Means of Grace

Receive the Lord’s Supper the next time it is offered in your congregation. There, Christ gives you His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Let that holy gift soften your heart and send you out to be an agent of mercy in the world.

### Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, You led Israel through the Red Sea and buried their enemies in the water. In Holy Baptism, You have drowned my old Adam and raised me up with Christ. You alone are Lord of the living and the dead. Forgive me for the times I have judged others while relying on Your mercy for myself. Break my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh. Help me to forgive those who have sinned against me, just as You have forgiven me for the sake of Jesus. Send Your Spirit to make me a person of mercy, welcome, and peace. I ask this in the name of Your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Go in peace, and forgive from the heart—for you are forgiven in Christ.**