

9.13.2026 Delivered to Forgive A Lutheran Bible Study for Small Groups

Opening Prayer

Gracious Father, You led Your people through the sea and made them Your own. By water and the Spirit, You have brought us into Christ's death and resurrection. Forgive us for the sake of Jesus, and by Your Holy Spirit make us people who forgive one another from the heart. Amen.

Theme

God's deliverance in Christ is completely free and complete. The same God who saved Israel at the Red Sea has forgiven our debt in Jesus. Therefore, we are set free—not to judge one another in self-righteousness, but to live as a community of mercy and forgiveness, to the glory of God.

Scripture Focus

Exodus 14:19–31 — God saves Israel through the Red Sea, Psalm 114 — The earth trembles at the presence of the Lord, Romans 14:1–12 — Welcome one another without quarreling over opinions, Matthew 18:21–35 — Forgive your brother seventy times seven

Summary

Exodus 14 is the great rescue at the Red Sea. Israel is trapped between Pharaoh's army and the waters. The Lord moves the pillar of cloud behind them, stretches out His hand over the sea, and makes dry land appear. Israel walks through safely. The Egyptians follow, and the waters crash down upon them. Israel sees the great power of the Lord, fears Him, and believes.

Psalm 114 retells the exodus in astonishing poetry. Creation itself reacts to the presence of God: the sea flees, the Jordan River turns back, and the mountains skip like rams. The Creator God, the God of Jacob, is present among His people, and even the rock becomes water when He commands it.

Romans 14 calls believers to stop despising and judging one another over matters of conscience. Some Christians eat anything; some eat only vegetables. Some observe special days; others treat all days alike. Paul's point is profound: Christ is Lord of all. He died and rose so that He might be Lord of both the living and the dead. We do not have the final word over one another; God does.

Matthew 18 begins with Peter's question: "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answers: not seven times, but seventy times seven. He then tells the parable of the servant who was forgiven a gigantic, unpayable debt, but then refused to forgive a small, manageable debt. The master's word is clear: because you have received mercy, show mercy—or you have not truly received it.

Key Points

1. God does what we cannot do (Exodus 14)

The Israelites are terrified. The Egyptians are coming. There is nowhere to go. Moses tells them: “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord.”

God does everything. The cloud and the angel separate Israel from Egypt. The Lord drives the sea back with a strong east wind. The waters stand like walls. Israel simply walks through on dry ground. In the morning, when the Egyptians try to follow, the Lord “looks down” on them from the pillar of fire and throws them into panic. The chariot wheels clog. The soldiers cry, “Let us flee from Israel, for the Lord fights for them!” Then the waters return, and the entire Egyptian army is destroyed.

Notice that Israel did not earn this rescue. They did not fight, scheme, or make themselves worthy. God saved them purely out of mercy.

For Lutherans, this is a picture of baptism. In 1 Corinthians 10:1–4, Paul says the people were “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” The Red Sea is a type of the saving water of Baptism. We do not climb out of our sin by our own efforts. Christ goes through death for us and takes us with Him. The enemy—sin, death, and the devil—is drowned. In Baptism, God does everything, and we are given new life freely.

The judgment on Egypt is a serious reminder: God is the judge of all evil, including the evil in our own hearts. But in Christ, that judgment has fallen on our Substitute. The same water that destroyed Egypt becomes a path of life for God’s people.

2. The Creator is present with His Church (Psalm 114)

Psalm 114 is not just a memory of the past. It says, “Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His dominion.” When God saved His people, He was making a holy place where He would dwell.

The psalm personifies creation: “The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back.” Mountains leap like frightened sheep. Why? Because the Creator Himself is present. He is not a far-off god; He is the God of Jacob. He knows His people by name. And this powerful God works impossibly: He turns rock into a pool of water and flint into a spring.

We might ask, “If God’s presence makes the earth tremble, how can we draw near without being destroyed?” The answer is in Christ. The God whose presence makes mountains skip has come to us in Jesus. Through Jesus, we do not face the presence of God as sinners under judgment. We face Him as children who drink the water from the Rock—and that Rock is Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Where does God’s presence dwell today? In His Word, in Baptism, in Holy Communion, and among His gathered people. There, the Creator speaks and gives life.

3. There is one Lord, and we are not Him (Romans 14)

Paul writes to Christians who are arguing. Some are “weak in faith” and very worried about dietary rules and holy days. Others are “strong” and know that no food is unclean in itself. Each side is judging the other.

Paul stops the argument: “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”

This does not mean that doctrine does not matter. It means that in matters that God has neither commanded nor forbidden, we must not make our personal practice the test of someone else’s faith. Christ alone is Lord of the conscience. We can hold personal convictions, but we may not impose them as law on others.

At the same time, Paul is not saying, “Anything goes.” In Matthew 18, Jesus gives church discipline for actual sin. Romans 14 is about “disputable matters”—adiaphora. The point: love and welcome one another, because God has welcomed both you and your brother in Christ.

Luther taught a similar lesson. We are called to be “fully convinced in our own minds” (Romans 14:5), but we are not called to be masters over each other. There is one Judge.

And here is the good news: because Christ died and rose, the judgment we fear has already been faced by Jesus. For those who trust in Him, there is “no condemnation” (Romans 8:1). God’s judgment seat is no longer a threat to the believer, but a place where Christ’s righteousness stands for us. That same Christ is Lord of every Christian—weak or strong.

4. Forgiven people forgive (Matthew 18)

Peter thinks he is being generous: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Rabbis at the time taught that you should forgive someone three times. Seven sounds extra generous.

Jesus says: Not seven, but seventy times seven—meaning no limit. Then He tells a parable that explains why.

A servant owes his king 10,000 talents. This is an impossible amount—millions of dollars, a national debt. The servant cannot pay. The king orders that he and his family be sold. The servant begs for patience. But the king does far more than give him time: he releases him and forgives the entire debt.

The forgiven servant goes out and finds a fellow servant who owes him 100 denarii—about a hundred days’ wages. It is a real debt, but tiny compared to what he had been forgiven. He grabs his fellow servant by the throat and demands payment. When the other servant begs for patience, the forgiven servant refuses. He has him thrown into prison.

When the king hears about it, he is enraged: “Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?”

This parable is a mirror. Our sin against God is truly unpayable. We cannot fix it by being good enough. Only God's compassion can release us. And in Jesus, that compassion is real. At the cross, the debt of the whole world is paid.

But when we refuse to forgive others, we show that we do not really understand the Gospel. We are not saved **by** forgiving. We are saved **by grace through faith** in Christ. Yet saving faith produces fruits. As Luther says, we are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone. A forgiven heart becomes a forgiving heart.

The parable's ending is a warning from Jesus, not a return to salvation by works. It tells us that an unforgiving heart has not truly grasped the mercy of God. When someone asks, "How many times must I forgive?" Jesus says, "Who are you counting? Look at how much has been forgiven you."

Questions for Discussion

Exodus 14

1. What do you notice about God's activity in this story? How much does Israel contribute to its own salvation?
2. The people "feared the Lord and believed." What does it look like to fear and believe at the same time?
3. Where do you see Egypt chasing after you—old sins, habits, or fears that feel impossible to escape?
4. How does the Red Sea help us understand Baptism?

Psalms 114

5. The psalm says creation trembles at the presence of God. In worship, we come into the presence of God. Why is that both awesome and comforting?
6. In what ways do we need God to turn rocks into water in our lives right now?

Romans 14

7. What are some "disputable matters" today where Christians judge each other (food, drink, worship styles, Sabbath habits)?
8. Paul says, "We will all stand before the judgment seat of God." Why is it such a relief to let God be the judge?
9. How can we speak the truth in love without becoming self-righteous judges of other believers?

Matthew 18

10. Why is it tempting to set limits on how many times we will forgive someone?

11. What does the difference between 10,000 talents and 100 denarii teach you about your sin against God compared to the sins of others against you?

12. Is the unforgiving servant punished because he fails to forgive, or because his failure reveals his rejection of the master's mercy? How does this warning apply to us?

13. What is the difference between forgiving "in order to be forgiven" and forgiving "because you have been forgiven"?

Application

For this week, try one or more of these:

- Receive your forgiveness daily. Each morning, remember your Baptism and hear Christ's Word to you: "Your sins are forgiven." Let that be the foundation for your day.
- Pray the Fifth Petition slowly. In the Lord's Prayer, we say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Ask God to show you if there is someone you need to forgive—and then ask Him to change your heart.
- Refuse to judge a brother or sister in a disputable matter. Before speaking a critical word about another Christian's practice, ask: "Is this something Scripture actually forbids, or is it a matter of Christian freedom?" If it is freedom, leave judgment with the Lord.
- Do not keep count. If someone sins against you again this week, remember that Jesus did not keep count of your sins. He bore them all.
- If you are struggling to forgive someone, talk to a pastor or trusted Christian brother or sister. Do not let bitterness grow. Confess your struggle and receive God's grace in Word and Sacrament.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You led Your people through the water and You have led us through death into life in Your resurrection. Thank You for forgiving us more times than we can count. Give us the Spirit to forgive others from the heart, do good to those who sin against us, and live in peace with our brothers and sisters—all for Your glory. Amen.