Hi,

I hope your spirit is strong and engaged. This is the 30th of these covid-19 emails, which means we have completed five weeks of hard work, important but hard. In a covenant group Zoom call (I never thought I’d write those words), one member pointed us to Psalm 91. Consider beginning your day with this psalm all week long, for, indeed, the Lord is our refuge and fortress.

Here are today’s updates:

* **In my Sunday class at 12:00 noon** we’ll be talking about the evidence for the resurrection, for our Easter proclamation is not based on a blind leap of faith. We will meet on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle), of course. If you have trouble viewing the Facebook Live account without an account, [here is some help](https://diobeth.org/how-to-view-facebook-livestreams-without-an-account/). However, without an account, you will not be able to comment or ask questions.
* My weekday classes will be on Monday at 3pm (studying Matthew) and Tuesday at 11:45 (studying Genesis). Both will be on my Facebook page.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/).
* If you have any movie or book recommendations you’d like to share with everyone, please send them along.

Here is the sixth in this seven-part series on the Apostles’ Creed, what we believe and why it matters:

“the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins . . .”

***Colossians 1:9–14, 24-26 (NRSV)***

**9For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. 11May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. . . .**

**24I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. 25I became its servant according to God’s commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.**

***2 Corinthians 2:5-11 (NRSV)***

**5But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but to some extent—not to exaggerate it—to all of you. 6This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; 7so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. 9I wrote for this reason: to test you and to know whether you are obedient in everything. 10Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ. 11And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.**

As short as the Apostles’ Creed is, there are some phrases that I’m sure many of us say with little clue about what it really means for us. One is surely “the communion of saints.” So let’s take a careful look at both of these important words.

*Communion?*

Communion translates the Greek word, *koinonia.* It is also translated “fellowship.” *Koinonia* was acommon Greek word, used to talk about marriage, business partnerships, politics – anywhere that people shared resources and experiences. Similarly, many Methodist churches have a room that is designated the fellowship hall. It is easy to think that fellowship is merely a warm-hearted brotherly and sisterly love. Fellowship is certainly that – but also far more. That “far more” is what we are trying to get at with the biblical idea of communion, of *koinonia*.

The best way to understand *koinonia* is to see it as “sharing in” something. At Pentecost, Jesus’ followers shared in the gift and the power of the Holy Spirit, as do all Christians (2 Corinthians 13:13). Indeed, the *koinonia,* the communion*,* of the believers was a gift brought by the Spirit. But we also share in the Spirit, just as God has called us all to the *koinonia* of his Son, Jesus, which the apostle John makes clear in a letter to believers.

John writes: “we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship [*koinonia*/communion] with us; and truly our fellowship [*koinonia*/communion] is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1:3-4).

Why does John want us to grasp the truth of Jesus? First, so that like the community in Jerusalem, we might have fellowship (*koinonia*) with one another (the horizontal). Second that we might have *koinonia* with the “Father and his son Jesus Christ” (the vertical). And thirdly, so that our “joy may be complete.”

*Saints?*

Who are the saints who share this fellowship, who participate in this blessed communion? The saints are all believers, those living now, those have died, and even those who have yet to be born. The “communion of saints” is the Spirit-filled fellowship of all those who have ever had or ever will have faith in Jesus Christ.

“All believers” is the meaning of “saints” whenever you come across it in the New Testament. Only later did the word come to be used for certain distinctive Christians as designated by the Roman Catholic Church.

*Forgiven*

It is one thing to say the words, “I am forgiven.” It is another thing entirely to take it to heart. We have enough trouble forgiving ourselves or those we love the most. The idea that we will one day stand before God as a forgiven people, as a forgiven person – well, it is almost too much to comprehend. The great hymn, “Amazing Grace,” is aptly named. It *is* amazing, even shocking. In class after class that I teach, people ask me whether forgiveness is available to the most horrid monster they can imagine, such as Hitler or John Gacy. No matter how many times we answer the question, “yes,” as we should, it still shocks us, even scandalizes us. Could this really be?

First, ask yourself what needs forgiving. You’ll find that it is all the ways in which we have failed to love God and to love one another. “Sins” is the word we often use to describe all those ways. Here is a useful definition of sin: *sin is whatever separates us from God*. Think of sin as a large chasm. God stands on one side of the chasm and we stand on the other side. It wasn’t always this way. God once came in the evenings to walk with Adam and Eve, but that ended with their sin. They were separated from God; we are separated from God. Thus, the obvious question is how we cross the chasm to God. The short answer is that we can’t cross the chasm by our own efforts. Rather, the chasm has been closed by God, through his faithfulness to his covenant, through Jesus’ faithfulness all the way to the cross. It is God who has come to us. And it is by God’s grace and grace alone that we have been forgiven. In some mysterious way, never fully articulated in the New Testament, we have been reconciled to God through the death of Jesus on the cross. We have been redeemed. We have been made right with God. We have been justified. We have been forgiven. We have been saved. The chasm has been closed.

The next obvious question is this -- for whom has the chasm been closed? Who has been made right with God? It is the people of God who are a forgiven people, who have been redeemed. And how would we know who those people are? The people of God are those who have faith in Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul put it, the “badge of membership” in the people of God was once circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, the avoidance of pork and so on. But now, with Jesus’ death and resurrection the “badge of membership” in the people of God is simply faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-31).

This question quickly follows: But what about all those people who don’t come to faith in Christ or have never even heard of him? Frankly, I’m glad that all this is ultimately in God’s job description, not mine! Again we come back to the key question: will we trust God? Are we really willing to rely on God’s goodness, love, wisdom, mercy, and justice? I am. Do I hold out the hope that God’s grace extends past the grave, that people might have the opportunity to come to faith in Christ after death? I do, for I can find nothing in Scripture that prevents me from genuinely holding to such hope. . . . but in the end, I trust God.

*Forgiving*

The forgiven are to be forgiving. It is like breathing – in and out. We are to breathe out the very forgiveness that we have breathed in. Today’s passage from 2 Corinthians is a good example.

The apostle Paul was in the business of founding communities of new Christians. We can easily imagine (or can we?) the problems and difficulties that must have arisen. There is a man in Corinth who must have done something terrible and was, in essence, kicked out of the Christian community. Paul was known to urge this from time to time when someone posed so big a threat that the community’s existence was in doubt. We don’t know much about the circumstances, only what we can infer from the letter. But what is clear is that Paul is telling the community that the time has come to bring the man back in, to forgive and to console him.

This has nothing to do with whether the man deserves the forgiveness. There is nothing said about his repentance or about a change in ways. Paul simply says it is time to forgive. Forgiveness in the New Testament “is a term whose understanding is grounded in God’s giving freely and graciously to people who do not deserve it. . . . [In a community] the term functions to describe the restoration of relationships between or among people.” Grace and forgiveness are bound together. Indeed, sometimes in the NT, the word translated as “forgive” (including in today’s passage from 2 Corinthians) is actually a derivation from the Greek, *charis*, meaning “grace” or “gift.”

Yet how hard it can be for us to offer this grace, this forgiveness, to others, even to those we love. Instead, we harbor our hurts and slights. How many spouses have not said to themselves at one time or another, I’m not going to apologize until she apologizes first. Or perhaps, I can’t forgive until she repents.

But instead of all this counting and figuring, all this balancing of hurts and slights, Jesus instructs us to simply forgive as we have been forgiven, to extend to others the grace that has been extended to us. How can we possibly do this? Only by the power of the Holy Spirit, yet another of God’s many gifts to us. Truly, forgiveness unlocks the power of love.

*More movie and book recommendations on Monday.*

‘til Monday, grace and peace,

Scott