

## "Free or Bound?"

Dear friends in Christ,

**Though we miss worshipping together in our church, we are blessed to be able to continue our ministries.** I hope you participate in our online worship at [felcww.org](http://felcww.org) and weekly devotions on Facebook. Please come to our "Coffee and Conversation" time, on Zoom on Sunday mornings, starting at 11 a.m. on Sunday mornings (our new time). Meals on Wheels continue, more than 200 quilts have been made, school kits have been assembled, "Campus and Community Meals" can be picked up "to go" starting on Monday, Sept. 14, at the Congregational UCC, from 5 -6 p.m. Choir rehearsals are held in cars in the parking lot each week. I will be leading Confirmation classes online starting Sept. 16, and virtual Sunday School will begin on Oct. 4. Our Stewardship appeal on the theme, "Faithful, Hopeful, Loving," is planned for October. There will be a 2nd Contactless Parking Lot Service on Sunday, Sept. 20 at 6:30 p.m. at the church parking lot. Committees are meeting, mostly remotely, and our staff and I continue to work hard and faithfully. I thank you for your generous financial support for our church. **Please know you can call me any time at (608)354-2058 or e-mail me at [pastorstevevw@gmail.com](mailto:pastorstevevw@gmail.com)** I pray for you and thank you for your prayers for others.

**In our Gospel reading this Sunday, Jesus tells about a king who checks his accounts and finds that one of his managers owes him \$10 million.** The manager begs for mercy and for time to pay the impossible debt. Unexpectedly, the king decides to completely forgive the debt. And all of a sudden, the manager is free. His unpayable debt is instantly eliminated, gone for good.

**Imagine the manager, walking from the palace, feeling happy and free. But then the manager sees a lower-level worker, one who owes him a small amount, about \$50.** The manager falls back into captivity, back to the accounting books and to thinking about what he is owed. He says, "Hey, you owe me \$50. Pay me now." The worker says, "Please have patience with me. I get paid next Friday." But that's not OK with the manager. The man whose enormous debt was forgiven has the worker thrown in jail. Can you believe it? Freed from an unpayable debt, this man can't wait another week?

**It is often true that we are the cause of our own captivity.** We may think we are only being fair, that we know what is right. We have a self-inflicted ignorance of grace. Our captivity is due to our own inability to accept the freedom we are given, the freedom to come out of our self-centeredness and enter Christ's kingdom of freedom. When we accept the forgiveness Christ offers, we enter the realm of abundant life, for ourselves and others.

**God freely forgives us, but we have to learn gratitude.** Being grateful calls us to step outside ourselves. Little children think the world revolves around them, and we may smile indulgently. But it is not so charming when adults insist that the world center

on them and what they want. Gratitude is the recognition of another person doing something for us, and receiving the gift with thankfulness. We must not take grace for granted, or think we have a right to a gift. If we do that, we deprive ourselves of the wonder of gifts given and received.

**Grace is like a clear late summer day.** Grace is a candle's light in a dark room . Grace embraces us with its warmth. Grace lifts us up when we are discouraged. Grace frees us and makes it possible for us to breathe deeply. **Grace is a gift that we are to share.** Grace moves us from harshness to acceptance. We can graciously accept what we do not deserve, and we can pass it on to others. Grace is always surprising, never routine. Grace surpasses what we expect. Maybe that is why ignoring the freedom grace offers is so shocking: like the manager who rejects the transforming power of grace in Jesus' story; like being forgiven for a large wrong done to someone, and then refusing to forgive someone else for a small offense.

**The basis of gratitude is grace. But why is it so hard to accept grace?** Maybe it's because grace will change us, and perhaps we don't want to be changed. Accepting grace leads to gratitude. And gratitude leads us to accept Jesus' math, and Jesus' math allows for a limitless offering of grace. You see, grace has no limit.

Of course we know that we should not run up debts we cannot pay. We should not take advantage of people. We should not behave selfishly and carelessly. **Life in society depends on not just doing whatever we want to do, on caring for the health and well-being of others, on being respectful of others. But even more important, life in community depends on showing others the forgiveness and grace that God has shown us.**

**God gives us the gift of new life.** Why would we choose to stay locked in self-centeredness and resentment? Why not accept the freedom of being forgiven and forgiving others? It's true---forgiveness is not fair. It is grace. **Gods' gracious forgiveness gives us freedom to live, not to count up the imperfections and weaknesses of others, but to share God's gracious acceptance and love with others.**

**Thank God for the freedom his forgiveness gives us. And thank God for freedom to forgive others!**

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Steve