Prayer & Passion: Forgive Us Our Trespasses
Fifth Petition
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During the hymn, you may have noticed that ushers put a line down each aisle with this blue painter's tape. So there's a line now, a boundary, between you *(on one side of the aisle)* and you *(on other side).* And let's all pretend for a few minutes that it's not just blue tape. Let's imagine that this is a powerful weapons-grade blue laser beam – and if you cross it or go over that line in any way, you're going to be vaporized. So stay there. Don't cross over that line! I don't want to see you get vaporized here in the church. That would get messy.

Now, the Lord's Prayer doesn't mention laser beams and vaporizing teenagers. But it does talk about boundaries, and lines we shouldn't cross, as followers of Jesus. More importantly, the Lord's Prayer teaches us how to avoid being vaporized when those lines are crossed.

Jesus teaches us to pray, using the familiar old English translation (which comes, by the way, not from the King James version but from the even older Tyndale Bible), "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Say that with me out loud, but say the words slowly.

We pray those words all the time; but stop and think for a minute about what that word "trespass" means. When you see a "No Trespassing" sign, you know that means you can't go past that sign. To "trespass" means to go into a place without permission. It means to cross some line that you're not supposed to cross.

Now, in the Prayer of our Lord, he's not talking about physical boundaries made of chain-link fence, or locked doors. "Forgive us our trespasses" means "forgive us our sins."

When we sin, we are crossing a line that we're not supposed to cross. Sin is going into some place that we are not supposed to go into. Sin is crossing over the boundary line between what's right and what's wrong.

Now, our ushers marked these blue tape lines tonight. But who sets the boundary lines for sin? Who decides what is a sin, and what's not a sin? What constitutes moral trespassing, and who gets to decide that? The world's answer is far different than God's answer. And when we're here in church we normally focus on God's answers. But we have to live in the world every day; so let's think for a moment about what the world is saying to us about boundary lines.

The world says that the government and the courts will decide on certain important matters; but that, for the most part, you can decide for yourself what's right and what's wrong. Our culture teaches us that there are really no absolute standards, that everything is ultimately up to your own opinion, your own interpretation, your own deconstruction. American society today dictates that freedom of religion is all well and good, but that you don't dare impose your religious views of right and wrong on anybody else. More and more, the world we live in is a moral and ethical free-for-all. Who decides what's a sin and what's not a sin? The world today tells us that there are very few boundaries that we really have to pay attention to.

But God tells us differently, doesn't he? As Christians, we need to be clear on this. Our culture doesn't have the final

say on boundaries. Popular opinion does not dictate what's right and wrong. It's not you and I, either; and it's not even the government or the courts that ultimately draw the lines on moral and ethical matters. It's God! It's God who lays down the boundaries. It's God who sets the limits. It's God who determines when you're trespassing, and it's God who decides when I'm wandering where I don't belong and sinning by my trespass.

Our God knows all the trespassing you've done this week, and he is aware of all my sins. And while he could have just vaporized us, and punished us for all our line-crossing, instead God sent his Son to take our punishment. God didn't vaporize Jesus with a bright blue weapons-grade laser beam; but he allowed his innocent, holy Son to be arrested rudely, accused falsely, convicted unjustly, tortured cruelly, humiliated publicly, and hung to die on a cross – all for our sins, for our forgiveness.

So we pray from the heart, "Forgive us our trespasses" -- and God does forgive us, because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has already done for you and me on Good Friday.

This part of the Lord's Prayer, then, helps us Christians to acknowledge that grace, to recognize and accept God's sweet, precious forgiveness through our faith in Jesus.

But that's not all, is it? There's more to this Fifth Petition. Say it with me again, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Those who trespass against us …

Jesus teaches us here that it is wrong to ask from God what we are not willing to give to others. So when we pray this sentence, we're really asking God to give us the ability to

forgive others, to give us the heart to let go of the hurts others have caused us.

And that's hard, isn't it? Stop and think for a moment tonight. Who is it that you're struggling to forgive? I've asked you that in sermons before; but it's important to keep that list in your mind and to pray about those relationships. Who has trespassed against you? Who's done you wrong, and who's on your list of enemies and outcasts?

Does Jesus really expect us to forgive all of those people? Not easily. Not always quickly. Not that we should always be able to fix relationships and forget about the wrongs done to us. But neither should the flood of mercy which God has sent toward us be entirely denied to those people. Jesus teaches us here that it is wrong to ask from God what we are not willing to give to others.

On this 32nd day of Lent, we pray with Jesus tonight about trespasses. We talk to God about the boundaries he's laid down, the lines we've crossed sinfully; and we seek his help in dealing with those sins others have done to us. Pray with me, one last time, the Fifth Petition, as Jesus taught us: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." And let all God's people together say, "Amen."