

Third Sunday of Creation Care: Bishop's Visit and Confirmation

September 14, 2026 • 10:30am

Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rt. Rev. Shannon Rogers Duckworth

In the name of one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, please be seated.

This week, it has been so hard to believe that it's been 25 years since 9-11, and of course, we have remembered those who lost their lives, as well as the first responders, including my husband, who around the country answered the call literally the next day to do their work in this time. And my son sent me a video about the sermon that was preached at the funeral of Michael Judge.

Michael Judge is the first fatality of 9-11. He was a Franciscan priest. The image of him being carried out by his fellow brothers is an image that we all hold from that terrible day.

He was actually, he died while he was administering last rites to a fireman. His friend, Michael Duffy, was asked to preach at his funeral a few days later, and he said that it would have been easier to ask him to preach at the funeral of Mother Teresa than to preach at the funeral of his friend. But the truth is that here we are, 25 years later, still talking about that sermon that was preached.

He said this, the way Michael died was, in its way, the most Michael Judge way that he could have died. He did what he always did. He showed up in the middle of the mess of things when they were the hardest and the most difficult.

He would always be the first to go and to pray over someone who was hurting. And he talks about that image of them carrying his body out. And as they prayed over him, then they turned and did exactly what he would want them to do.

They turned back and went back into danger and to do the work that they were supposed to do. So I bring up this story of this Catholic priest today, not by chance.

As we think about this reading about the unforgiving servant, we all know those, the living and the dead, who have put more into the column that gives rather than the column that collects.

Those who serve the addicted and the dying, the suffering, those who the world may feel like there is no room for them. Those who do not keep score. Those who do not, he does not say, well, you don't deserve my time.

So what the world remembers is not a man who forgave 70 times, seven times, but a man who learned that that debt shouldn't even be counted in the first place. And Peter asked a question that at first seems like a pretty good Peter question. This is Peter.

He's just walking that very fine line. And he says, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times? By the math of his own tradition, Peter is already overperforming as Peter likes to do. He thinks he's going to get the gold star because it's a three strikes and you're out situation.

But Jesus doesn't give him this one. He says not seven times, but 77 times. And even some manuscripts say 70 times seven.

In other words, an infinite amount of time. Because the moment that you start keeping that tally, as soon as you're making those checks on that card, you have missed the point. And then because Peter's question for him was all about arithmetic, you realize that what Jesus is talking about is that there's no payment plan here.

The debt was an inconceivable amount. It is far, it is beyond anything that you could have imagined in this lifetime. It was never going to be repaid.

So when that debt was released, it was a release of his soul, of his life, of his heart, of his future. It was all of it. And then we know that the story goes on.

It doesn't end there. Then that man who has just experienced this incredible forgiveness goes and he takes that life and he hoards it to himself. It's not for anyone else.

He wasn't cruel in the abstract. He took that bit of money, which actually was an amount of a debt that was probably reasonable for the time, and he counted it as a debt worth remembering. Right after a debt of 10,000 talents was erased for him, he held on to an accounting that should have been closed.

So we ask ourselves, why was this? Why did he hold on to this account that should have been closed? Because even in the face of such incredible mercy, his heart was not changed. His heart was not moved. We've all been forgiven a debt.

That is the whole gospel story. Every week, every time, every day. But the question for us this morning on this incredible day of celebration, we welcome new members into the Episcopal Church.

The question for us today is that now that we've all been forgiven this much, what will you do for others? What ways in which will you forgive others? How will you listen and understand and not just respond? How will you assume good intentions and not keep the account open? Will you trust that the same Spirit who has carried you, this church, for all of these years will carry you still?

But again, if that heart work, if that transformation doesn't occur, then we don't understand the real story of this parable. Because it's about relationship, because it's about communion, and it's about the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Anything other than that are just tallies on a sheet.

There was one quote from the sermon that I want to end with, and it's a painting that I know that many of you are familiar with. It's Picasso's painting of the two hands holding, handing off flowers to each other. He said this, it reminds me of a very well-known Picasso sketch.

You know the one I mean. There's a small bouquet, it's colorful, and a hand coming from the left side and a hand coming from the right side. Both hands are holding the bouquet.

But the artist was clever enough to draw hands in such a way that you don't know who is giving and who is receiving. My friends, that is the beauty of the forgiveness that Jesus is talking about here. We can't see the lines.

There are no scores being kept. Seventy times seven, Jesus says. Seventy times seven.

Which is to say, my friends, just stop counting. Start forgiving from the heart and trust that the God who forgave the whole debt is still not finished with us. Thanks be to God.

Amen.