



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

14th Sunday after Trinity ~ September 13th 2020

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

We have Church services with social distancing, and also, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries. We want people to have a genuine choice. We are also thinking about how other aspects of church life and people's needs can be met. Ideas and suggestions welcome.

St Peter's: Sundays 8am & 11am ~ Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's: Sundays 9.15am

St John's: Sundays 9:30am ~ Tuesdays 10am

Please Note:

Except for medical reasons (and those under 11) we are now required to wear a face mask in our church buildings.

Prayers for this Week

O God, most high, you are slow to anger and rich in compassion. Keep in us the memory of your mercy, that our angers may be calmed and our resentments dispelled. May we discover the forgiveness promised to those who forgive and become people rich in mercy. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

God of debts forgiven, you call to account our hunger for power; you disturb hierarchies which crush the weak: break through the vicious cycles of revenge and domination that we might look to him whose mercy never ends, Jesus Christ, our redeemer.
Amen.

Reading: Matthew 18 v21-35

Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

Meditation

We carry on with questions about forgiveness, and why not? For reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel. Having had, in our readings over the last few weeks, Peter and the disciples being told that forgiveness is very much their responsibility and asked to be persistent in ways seeking reconciliation, now Peter asks, how often should I forgive? He gets an answer from Jesus that is large, and quite possibly without limit; 77 or even 70 x 7!

Peter's question, "how often?" is a reasonable one. It does seem foolish to connive with a repeat offender. We do have a limit to our patience. Sometimes it does seem time to call things to a halt. But we are reminded that God has infinite patience, and we can try to reflect this.

We then get a story, which clearly is about forgiveness and begins in the usual way, "the kingdom of heaven is like....," but goes on to talk about money and debts. The slave who is utterly bankrupt and will lose everything is released and forgiven. Notice he in fact only asks for time to repay, but get his debt remitted, his obligations redeemed and he is completely forgiven and set free. However, when, notice on a vastly smaller scale, the slave is asked to do the same for another, he refuses to do as he has been treated. This causes scandal, and a sense of injustice and the king gets to hear of it. The king reverses his mercy and incarcerates the once forgiven slave with hard labour until the debt is paid. It is of course an illustration in story of the petition of the Lord's prayer; "*Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us*" or in the old familiar language, "*forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*".

The versions of the Lord's prayer that we use in church have been expanded and adapted from the gospel versions, Luke gives; "*Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.*" And Matthew "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.*"

Matthew uses the money word debt, both for what we are forgiven and for what we are to forgive. Luke asks we be forgiven sins, but then asks that we remit debt. Matthew does immediately go on to make the connection for he adds straight after the prayer, "*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" Our parable today clearly repeats exactly the same message.

But, let's not too hastily move on from the debt and money implications. For in some era's past, and in some churches today it has a lot to say about sin, and not so much to say about money; how we earn it, how we spend it, or how it gives controlling values to our society.

There are people who are crippled by personal debt, and for whom it is very difficult to see a way forward. There are poor nations who have to repay debt to richer ones in preference to spending on health and education. There are businesses which provide valuable products or services that cannot get investment. There are people seeking homes who because of temporary contracts, job insecurity, lack of deposits are unable to do so. There are people who have savings that are unprotected and at risk. There are Governments who can increase debt for immediate causes who seem to be able borrow without limit. There have been companies who have been too big to fail. And so on.....

All these are issues with a Theological or faith dimension. Jesus links his key task of redemption (itself a money word) with economic stories and petition in prayers. So we are presented from today's readings with challenges for; international debt, how can we remit it? Decent homes for all people, how can they afford it? Which businesses can be supported through covid, and which have to seek alternative futures? Pensions; how do we have equity between the generations? Trade; what do we mean by fair trade and how do we have a trading system that sustainably cares for our planet? Who has the power in our economy for what ends, and who should hold the reigns of influence? and more.....

Today's gospel points us towards being grateful for what we have; being more than generous to those who have less than us; to be patient and seeing things in the long term whilst acting decisively when opportunity presents; to having a picture of the interdependence of the world and to follow agendas that are not for selfish gain but for mutual flourishing.

Peter quite reasonably asked how much and how often, and got an answer "more than you think", and we get a similar answer to similar questions. The gospel is about God's generous redeeming gift to us through Christ, and that means we have to think and act about money issues.

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

Abba, our God,
whom the heavens disclose,
may your name be held holy,
your authority come.
May your longing be fulfilled as in heaven, so on earth.
Give us today the bread of tomorrow,
and cancel our debts as we have already forgiven our debtors.
Do not draw us in to sinful enticement,
but set us free from the grip of evil:
for authority and power and glory are yours alone, for ever. **Amen.**

Forgive us our debts.

O God to whom we owe more than we can count,
in our desire to control all that will come to be,
we hold your other children in the grip of debt which they cannot repay:
and make them suffer now the poverty we dread.
Do not hold us to our debts, but unchain our fear,
that we may release others into an open future of unbounded hope
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

Deliver us from evil.

God our redeemer, you have promised liberation for our world:
remission of debts, forgiveness of sins.
Deliver us, body, mind, and spirit from the grip of all that is evil;
and may we who claim the blessing of release have the courage to live by it,
in the name of him who died to set us free,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**