

Morning Prayer for Websites – 13th September 2020

GATHERING PRAYER

Let us come to the God who knows us, to the God who created us, to the God who knows our frailties and forgives them, to the God who loves and cherishes us beyond measure. Amen

WELCOME AND GREETING

This is the day the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

We have come together in the name of Christ to offer our praise and thanksgiving, to hear and receive God's holy word, to pray for the needs of the world, and to seek the forgiveness of our sins, that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may give ourselves to the service of God.

INVITATION TO CONFESSION

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, to be our advocate in heaven, and to bring us to eternal life. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you, through our own fault, in thought, and word, and deed, and in what we have left undone. We are heartily sorry, and repent of all our sins. For your Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from all our sins, confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and keep us in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

THE PEACE

Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be called children of God. We meet in his name and share his peace.

If we like, we can wish peace to absent family, friends and neighbours by placing our hand on our heart and holding a moment of silence.

This touching of the heart connects us all, hand to chest, heart to heart, with love, peace and comfort to everyone.

BIBLE READING – Romans 14:1-12

Do Not Judge Another

14 Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ² Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³ Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶ Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷ We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God."

¹² So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – Matthew 18:21-35

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew. Glory to you, O Lord.

Forgiveness

²¹ Then 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?" ²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

²³ “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ 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.

²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ 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.’ ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ 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. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

This is the gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ

TALK

We'll start with a brief prayer:

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Peter is trying to work something out. Jesus has been talking about people who are brothers and sisters in faith and how they should resolve their differences, and now Peter is asking him how many times he should forgive someone who has done him down. He wants a number – forgiving someone can be hard work, and if they keep reoffending, keep doing the thing you think is wrong or being rude to you or whatever it may be, it feels like banging your head against a brick wall to keep forgiving them. How many second chances should you give someone? It's annoying when you are being generous enough to forgive them for what you regard as a piece of heinous or

inappropriate behaviour, and they fail to realise how generous and marvellous you are being, and keep behaving in the same way. Surely, thinks Peter (and I don't know if he had a certain person or action in mind – the disciples didn't always get on that well together), surely I don't have to go on and on forgiving. Seven sounded about the right number, he reckoned – after that he could just ignore the person or even have a blazing row with them and tell them exactly what he thought instead of having to be nice to them and make allowances. The rabbis said three so Peter was being generous.

What is Jesus' answer to Peter's kind suggestion? 'Not seven, but seventy-seven.' And by that, he didn't literally mean seventy seven; he meant, a lot; he meant for ever; he meant that forgiveness is a lifestyle not an equation; a constant attitude not a one-off event.

Jesus wasn't saying that Peter or anyone else had to just let people get away with sinful or wrong behaviour – he has already explained in verses 15 to 17 how that should be dealt with by the whole fellowship. He meant that even if you have to seek mediation and you're not happy with the outcome, you still need to forgive. Not necessarily forget, but forgive, and go on forgiving.

The parable Jesus told to illustrate his point was about a man who failed to forgive someone who owed him a little money, even though he had been shown great mercy by his master to whom he owed a great deal of money. The master was forgiving and gave him another chance. He himself was not forgiving, but dealt harshly with the man who happened to owe him a hundred denarii.

Now it's not hard to work out who the dramatis personae, the actors, in this parable might be. We owe God, *our* master, a great deal. As individuals, as groups of people, as nations, and as a human race we have failed God in so many ways. All he asks is for us to acknowledge him, to return the love he gives us and lead the best life we possibly can, a life where we fulfil all the potential God gives us and are happy. That shouldn't be too difficult – following him is in our own best interests - but somehow since the time of Adam and Eve, we've wanted to go our own way. We have free will so we can do this, but we have to accept the consequences. But even then, God does not want to separate himself from us, but wants to give us more chances, finally sending his son Jesus to show us how to live. So he forgives us for our wayward actions if we turn to him.

We need constant reminding of the dangers of going our own way, and that's why we say our confession every week in church, saying sorry for what we've got wrong and re-dedicating ourselves to following God's way. There can't be many weeks when we come to the confession and think – don't need to say that this week, no sins of omission or commission here, God. This means we are reminded that we have something to say sorry to God for 52 times a year – it would only take a year and a half for us to have asked God to forgive us seventy seven times. And we can say that prayer in the knowledge that God has promised to forgive us if we are truly sorry. He has truly forgiven each of us many, many times, far more than 77.

The chap in the parable was forgiven a lot, but did he follow his lord and master's example? Did he go about spreading sweetness and light and saying what a good master he had and how he was going to be obedient to him all his days? Well, not so much. He took the forgiveness, was heartily thankful he and his nearest and dearest were not going to be locked up, and then seems to have forgotten all about it and carried on with life as normal, which involved harassing people who owed him a little bit of money.

Maybe he felt he was a good chap at heart and worked hard, and that his master had seen this and rewarded him by cancelling the debt. He saw this other man as having got into financial difficulties through his own fault and therefore he should suffer the consequences if he could not pay what he owed. **He** deserved forgiveness – the other man didn't.

It's easy to see who is the villain of this piece. It's the man who took all the forgiveness that was on offer – all ten thousand talents' worth – but then refused to forgive another. We would never be like this, would we? That man couldn't possibly be us, could he? We would never accept God's forgiveness, resolve to lead a new life following him, and then act in an unforgiving, unkind and judgemental way, which would be profoundly un-Christian. Well, I leave that to each one of you to work out for yourselves.

Forgiveness is not necessarily easy, but we must put wrongs done to us in the context of how we have been forgiven so much by God. Over the last few years and months there have been stabbings and shootings of young men in our big cities, recent stabbings in Birmingham, and we are being reminded now of the suicide bomber in Manchester, so much seemingly senseless violence. The bereaved families clearly want justice and for the perpetrators to be dealt with by the law and to

realise what they have done, but I am struck from time to time when members of a family, often a Christian family, point out that two young men's lives have been ruined, that of the victim and of the aggressor, and say that they forgive.

Forgiving someone doesn't mean letting them off; it doesn't mean not tackling the behaviour that is causing problems or distress, and a helpful part of the process in these criminal cases may be in seeing the person being dealt with by the courts, but forgiveness *can* help enable the victims or bereaved to start again. To forgive someone isn't to let them trample all over you and your feelings and to ignore their bad behaviour, but in forgiving someone you are making it clear that they have not won, that what they have done has not had a permanent effect on you as a person. It may take time and much prayer, but even though the deed may have hurt you very much, by forgiving you are not holding onto grievances which makes the damage to yourself worse.

The reading today from Matthew and that of last week and in the next chapter have much to say to us about how we should behave. We are brothers and sisters here; we are God's church in this part of the world and we need to show understanding and forgiveness to each other and to those around us. We should talk to each other respectfully about things we find difficult or don't agree with, and show love and care for each other. Without that, we will not be in a position to show love and care for our neighbours and see our churches grow in numbers and in depth of faith.

A prayer:

*Dear Lord, let us never forget that we all go astray and we all need your forgiveness time after time. Thank you for your great love and your desire to forgive us and have us resume our walk with you. Help us to forgive too. **Amen***

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

INTERCESSIONS

Response: The Lord is full of compassion. **His love lasts for ever.**

In the knowledge of all God has done for us, let us bring to him our concerns for the church and for the world.

Thank you, Father, for the love which forgives again and again, and is prepared to trust us with the care of your people even after we have let you down so many times. Teach us to minister to one another's needs with compassion, sensitivity and discipline, so that all are affirmed and encouraged.

The Lord is full of compassion. His love lasts for ever.

Thank you, Father, for the order and variety, simplicity and complexity of this universe. Thank you for all that humankind is able to do; may all these gifts be used wisely and well, for the good of all. We pray for those who are working on a vaccine for coronavirus and for the fair sharing of the vaccine when achieved.

The Lord is full of compassion. His love lasts for ever.

Thank you, Father, for all we have been forgiven and for the opportunities each day we have to forgive others. Break through our self-righteousness and keep us learning in humility at your feet.

The Lord is full of compassion. His love lasts for ever.

Thank you, Father, for all those who care for the sick, the distressed, the ungrateful and the difficult. We pray for all who are on the end of hate, deceit, suspicion or abuse, and for those who make judgements and mistreat people out of malice or ignorance. We pray for your healing and transforming.

The Lord is full of compassion. His love lasts for ever.

Thank you, Father, for those whose living and dying has taught us much about love. Freed from their pain and restrictions of age or injury, may they enjoy for ever the life of heaven.

The Lord is full of compassion. His love lasts for ever.

Thank you, Father, for disturbing our complacency and challenging us to move forward with you, assured of your company and your love.

The Lord is full of compassion. His love lasts for ever.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

COLLECT

Almighty God, whose only Son has opened for us a new and living way into your presence: give us pure hearts and steadfast wills to worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

LORD'S PRAYER

As our Saviour has taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen

BLESSING

The Lord bless us and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life. Amen

NOTICES

Please continue to remember members of our church family who are unwell or anxious at this time. We think especially of Keith Hadden having surgery soon, Eileen Kichenside, Frank Inston and Naomi Philips. Let us continue to pray also for children, families and school staff. And continue to give thanks that Christine has returned home although she is still having treatment.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. In the name of Christ. Amen

VirtualServices/Websites13Sept20