



**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

*compiled by Vicki Brown (Lay Assistant)*

*This service has been prepared for you to use at home. We pray that as we join together, wherever we are, we will be united through words, music and images as we worship God.*

***Opening Prayer***

Our desire, our need, our yearning  
draws us together to worship God.  
In our homes, separate yet united in the Spirit.  
Unexplainable, unimaginable,  
unbelievable, incomprehensible love,  
pulls at our heartstrings,  
tugs at our emotions,  
turns our eyes beyond the seeing.  
All-encompassing God, just as we are, we come.  
Amen

***Hymn As water to the thirsty (Singing the Faith 441)***

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|---|--|
| 1 As water to the thirsty,<br>as beauty to the eyes,<br>as strength that follows weakness,<br>as truth instead of lies,<br>as songtime and springtime<br>and summertime to be,<br>so is my Lord,<br>my living Lord,<br>so is my Lord to me. | 2 Like calm in place of clamour,<br>like peace that follows pain,<br>like meeting after parting,<br>like sunshine after rain,<br>like moonlight and starlight<br>and sunlight on the sea,<br>so is my Lord,<br>my living Lord,<br>so is my Lord to me. |
|---|--|

3 As sleep that follows fever,  
as gold instead of grey,  
as freedom after bondage,  
as sunrise to the day,  
as home to the traveller  
and all we long to see,  
so is my Lord,  
my living Lord,  
so is my Lord to me

*Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)*

***Let us pray together***

God of love and grace beyond our telling,  
with thankful hearts we come to you,  
acknowledging that you are everything to us.  
Thankful that you care for us with a love beyond measure,  
that you have endless patience with us, teaching us time and time again  
what it is to be committed to you and your way.  
Thankful that you reveal yourself to us in myriad ways, inspiring and prompting  
responses of worship and service.

Thankful that your love reaches everyone, and your love reaches me.  
May I know your love flooding my heart afresh today.  
Amen.

***Genesis 50 v 15-21 (NIV)***

*Joseph Reassures His Brothers*

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

This is a song I first heard in the 1980s. Having been accustomed to a message of repentance delivered with a strident tone, reminiscent of the call of John the Baptist, this song was revolutionary for me. Repentance responding to the gentle love of God, beauty and purity prompting a desire to be made pure and holy in return. It touched my experience of coming to faith in a pure white snowy Devon field as an eleven-year-old. I hope that as you reflect on the words, you receive a blessing too.

***Your Kindness by Leslie Phillips (From the album Black and White in a Grey World)***

*Waiting for angry words to sear my soul  
Knowing I don't deserve another chance  
Suddenly the kindest words I've ever heard  
Come flooding through my heart.*

*It's your kindness that leads us to repentance  
O Lord,  
Knowing that you love us  
No matter what we do  
Makes us want to love you too*

*No excuse, no one to blame, nowhere to hide  
The eyes of God have found my failures, found my pain.  
He understands my weaknesses and knows my shame,  
But his heart never leaves me.*

*It's your kindness that leads us to repentance O Lord,  
Knowing that you love us  
No matter what we do  
Makes us want to love you too.*

*If you are for us who can be against us?  
You gave us everything  
Even your only Son.*

*It's your kindness that leads us to repentance O Lord  
Knowing that you love us  
No matter what we do  
Makes us want to love you too.*

## **Matthew 18 v 21-35 (NIV)**

### *The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant*

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

## **Reflection**

Forgiveness is a troublesome subject. It is said that to forgive is easy until you actually have something to forgive. If we hold to the idea that forgiveness is to say, “It’s fine, it doesn’t matter anyway.” That’s OK when we take a breath after someone has jumped ahead of us in a supermarket queue. That moment of indignation will soon fade as we put those small slights in perspective.

The readings today are dealing with much larger issues.

Joseph’s brothers had plotted his demise, sold him to slavery and told their father he was dead. Years had passed, years that could have brewed a bitter resentment and desire for revenge in Joseph’s heart. How different things would have been if Joseph chose to hate. No twelve tribes of Israel, no Moses, no King David and his family tree.... the children of Israel, the Hebrew people, have their existence founded upon forgiveness. Love and grace giving life.

The Gospel reading sees Peter making a generous suggestion of how many times he should forgive a brother who sins against him. Contemporary rabbis thought three was good enough. Seven was a number important in the Old Testament. The Jubilee Year was at the end of seven times seven years, referred to in Leviticus 25. It was a year when slaves were freed and debts forgiven, so it is perfectly reasonable for Peter to have thought he was going to be praised for his idea to forgive seven times. Jesus as he so often does, goes way beyond this. Some translations say seventy- seven times, others seventy times seven. What is clear is that Jesus is not interested in the maths, it was never about counting. Forgiveness is about attitude. To check off against a chart each time you forgive until you get to the maximum, well it speaks of duty and self-righteousness, together with an “Are we nearly there yet?” desire to finally not forgive. What Jesus is after is a transformation of the heart. He illustrates this with a graphic, exaggerated parable about a servant who owed an impossible debt being forgiven, then treating someone who owes him a far smaller amount in a harsh unforgiving way. God forgives us therefore we must forgive others. Jesus when he teaches how to pray says “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” There’s no way round it, we must forgive.

However, what does that actually mean? There are so many quotes from people who have experience of this. Nelson Mandela said, “When a deep injury is done to us, we never heal until we forgive.” The

theologian Lewis Smedes said, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you." Forgiveness is not a delusional denying of pain. Healing does not come from pretending we are not hurt. Forgiving is powerful and life changing because it matters. When we know we must forgive and yet feel overwhelmed by pain and rage, we must look to Jesus and rest in his presence. We love because we are loved, we forgive because we are forgiven. Jesus is calling us to a life of joy and freedom. Where bitterness and resentment have no place, the wrongs that may have been done to us have no power to hurt any more. Where the peace of God permeates every aspect of our lives. This is the Kingdom of Christ.

Take a moment to pause and reflect upon the words of this song by Tim Hughes.

***Everything (Singing the Faith 497)***

*God in my living, there in my breathing,  
God in my waking, God in my sleeping.  
God in my resting, there in my working,  
God in my thinking, God in my speaking.  
Be my everything, be my everything....*

*God in my hoping, there in my dreaming,  
God in my watching, God in my waiting.  
God in my laughing, there in my weeping,  
God in my hurting, there in my healing.  
Be my everything, be my everything....*

*Christ in me, Christ in me,  
Christ in me the hope of glory  
You are everything.*

***The Lord's Prayer***

***We pray together***

Liberating God, we pray for those held captive physically.  
For those who are in slavery, those who are political prisoners,  
those who are in abusive relationships.  
Bring justice and freedom to the oppressed.  
We pray for those who are held captive spiritually.  
Enslaved to addictive behaviour, prisoners to past regrets,  
those who are in despair.  
Bring the power of your Holy Spirit  
break the chains that bind and set them free.  
Lord, we pray for ourselves.  
Forgive us for holding grudges, for nursing resentment when  
we should be following your holy example.  
May we walk humbly and gently in your footsteps,  
blessing others with kindness, demonstrating the power of  
forgiveness in and through our lives.  
May your love shine in us, bringing glory to you O God.  
Amen.

**Hymn: May the mind of Christ my Saviour (Singing the Faith 504/H&P 739)**

1 May the mind of Christ my Saviour  
Live in me from day to day,  
By his love and power controlling  
All I do or say.

2 May the word of God dwell richly  
In my heart from hour to hour,  
So that all may see I triumph  
Only through his power.

3 May the peace of God my Father  
Rule my life in everything,  
That I may be calm to comfort  
Sick and sorrowing.

4 May the love of Jesus fill me  
As the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self-forgetting –  
This is victory.

5 May I run the race before me,  
Strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus  
As I onward go.

*Kate Barclay Wilkinson (1859-1928)*

### **Blessing**

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,  
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.  
And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be amongst you and remain with you always.  
Amen

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*A poem by Katrina Crosby – God of autumn*

God of autumn,  
help us to be more like nature,  
accepting the changing seasons;  
like the changing of the trees:  
not a dying as life sometimes feels,  
but a stripping bare in preparation for inner growth,  
knowing that to shed the outer layers  
will reveal the strength that is hidden underneath.

God of autumn,  
it's so hard to let things go:  
the shields,  
the camouflage,  
the flimsy covers.....

We cannot hide from you;  
you are our strength,  
you see our inner beauty.  
you see beyond the human dressings  
and wish to clothe us in your love.

God of autumn,  
help us to be more like nature,  
accepting the changing seasons  
not because they are out of our control,  
but because they are in your hands.