

## Basingstoke and Reading Circuit Service 20 February 2022

– Prepared by Rev Martin Beukes

As we gather to worship: in chapels, on zoom, or in our homes, we come to remember that God draws near to us. Not just as we worship, but in each and every moment, the Creator of all things reaches out to us, draws us into the Love which gives us life. We pray that as we pause to worship, for God to make us extraordinarily aware of the Spirit's presence. We pray we would experience God's healing Love. And we pray we would be empowered to love other as Jesus has loved us. Amen

Hymn: Jesus calls us here to meet him (StF 28) - John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ModYoPReYYw>

<p>1 Jesus calls us here to meet him as, through word and song and prayer, we affirm God's promised presence where his people live and care. Praise the God who keeps his promise ; praise the Son who calls us friends ; praise the Spirit who, among us, to our hopes and fears attends.</p> <p>2 Jesus calls us to confess him Word of life and Lord of all, sharer of our flesh and frailness, saving all who fail or fall. Tell his holy human story ; tell his tales that all may hear ; tell the world that Christ in glory came to earth to meet us here.</p>	<p>3 Jesus calls us to each other, vastly different though we are ; creed and colour, class and gender neither limit nor debar. Join the hand of friend and stranger ; join the hands of age and youth ; join the faithful and the doubter in their common search for truth.</p> <p>4 Jesus calls us to his table rooted firm in time and space, where the Church in earth and heaven finds a common meeting place. Share the bread and wine, his body ; share the love of which we sing ; share the feast for saints and sinners hosted by our Lord and King.</p>
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Or alternative hymn: Come, let us with our Lord arise (StF 148) - Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvvr6TG7RX4>

### Prayers

God of love and grace, who reaches out to us even when we walk willingly into the darkness. Hear us.

God of light and life, you shine on the righteous and the wicked, offering us a glimpse of the way to your glory.

Yet, despite your light seeking us, showing us the way to forgiveness and wholeness, we hide from you in the shadows. We go our own way, fearful of the punishment for our sin. Fearful of what we have done in our wilful ignorance. *Silence...*

Lord forgive us what is passed and help us to see our lives as you see us. Open our eyes to see the light leading not to our deserved punishment, but to the love and grace of God. Help us to live lives which are tuned to your presence. Always aware of you with us, of you leading and guiding us. Of you inviting us to be your beloved children. Forgiven. Restored. Welcomed as your own. Amen

Hear Jesus' words to everyone who came to him on The Way, 'Your sin is forgiven, go in peace!'

**Hymn:** I know that my Redeemer lives (StF 303) - Samuel Medley (1738–1799)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PGYGI76\\_oA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PGYGI76_oA)

I know that my Redeemer lives — what joy the blest assurance gives! He lives, he lives, who once was dead; he lives, my everlasting Head!	He lives, and grants me daily breath; he lives, and I shall conquer death; he lives, my mansion to prepare; he lives, to lead me safely there.
He lives, to bless me with his love; he lives, to plead for me above; he lives, my hungry soul to feed; he lives, to help in time of need.	He lives, all glory to his name; he lives, my Saviour, still the same; what joy the blest assurance gives, I know that my Redeemer lives!

**Reading:** Luke 6:27-38 & Genesis 45:3-11,15

**Sermon:**

I love when Jesus speaks plainly in the gospels. It is one thing Jesus telling us stories which we need to interpret to understand them. It is a completely different thing when Jesus stands up and says, 'Do this and don't do that because it is not very clever'. In these moments, Jesus is always blunt, to the point, and rather difficult to hear.

Here Jesus is saying, 'Love those who despise you, because the alternative is life destroying.'

It makes me wonder if Jesus ever felt tempted to hold a grudge, or if he saw that the disciples were doing it to those who kept challenging him. I am sure that if Jesus saw the disciples starting to hate those who challenged him, it would have broken his heart, and would have led to Jesus saying what he is saying here.

I have always felt like I am fairly uniquely unable to hold a grudge. Possibly because it sounds like entirely too much effort. My family are all very passionate, determined and excitable. Both sides are as stubborn as can be. Both sides have a sense of resolve which means that they can do things far beyond what you may expect and resist doing something just because they decided not to. Both sides have a fair amount of quick temper to spare. I definitely inherited the latter, but none ever developed the ability to hold a grudge.

Grudges are a funny thing. I am sure you would have heard the saying that 'resentment is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies.' That is what bearing a grudge is always like. And yet, so often when someone has done us wrong, we sip and sip the poison like it is oh, so, sweet.

I would take the image one step further. Have you ever sat working or staring into the distance, deep in thought with a cup of tea or coffee, and then found you pick it up to have a sip, and there is nothing there? Your cup is empty and cold. I think that is what resentment is like. We don't when know we are drinking the cup before we realise all the poison is in us and we are just holding a disappointingly cold, empty cup. Or to go a step further, maybe our soul feels like that cup.

Turning to our Old Testament reading, Joseph can see the worst moment of his life turned into something good by God. This despite the people who caused all his suffering standing right in front of them. And he realises he does not need to drink the poison any more. His brothers are afraid of Joseph because even they think they deserve suffering and pain for what they did. And yet Joseph embraces them and welcomes them like brothers.

It is important to note here that some people deserve to be excluded from our lives. Sometimes the toxic relationship will always be toxic and the only way to be sure we don't expose ourselves to the suffering again and again is to cut ties. Also, it is important to note that forgiving never means forgetting. That is about forgiving the person, even if you hate what they have done and even when those actions mean you never

trust that person again. However, resenting a person is to sit and mix poison and sip it absentmindedly, like a cup of tea.

Joseph has every reason to hate his brothers. They tried to kill him, and sold him as a slave. I think he probably spent many years resenting them for it. And yet, here we have him realising that to bear a grudge against them means condemning his innocent little brother, his father and mother, his sisters, and nieces and nephews to die. His resentment would have very far-reaching consequences. Consequences which would literally steal the lives of his family. The exact thing he is angry at some of the family for doing to him.

With that in mind we turn to Jesus words. 'Love your enemies'; 'do not retaliate to attacks'; 'give generously even to someone who would rob you'; 'do not condemn'.

How can Jesus ask us to do so much? What about our own pain, our own broken hearts? I think the reason Jesus asks us to do so much is because he knows there is no way for our hearts to mend while we harbour evil intent towards another. If we do not love our enemies, we are drinking the poison. How does he know this? The Scriptures hints that this is exactly why Jesus saves us, because God is kind to humanity despite our being ungrateful and wicked.

As Jesus puts it in Luke, "Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Forgiving does not equal forgetting, but sometimes we hold our own healing and the healing of others in our hands. We can crush the life out of both, or we offer our forgiveness, even where we need to make it clear that the trust is forever dead.

Which makes me think, maybe that is why the Lord's Prayer repeats Jesus' words in our reading today... 'Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sinned against us.'

**Prayer** – by *Padraig O'Tuama* form *Daily Prayer*

Where there is separation  
there is pain.  
And where there is pain,  
there is story.

And where there is story,  
there is understanding,  
and misunderstanding,  
listening  
and not listening.

May we – separated peoples, estranged stranger,  
unfriended families, divided communities –  
turn towards each other,  
and turn towards our stories,  
with understanding  
and listening,  
with argument and acceptance,  
with challenge, change  
and consolation.

Because if God is to be found,  
God will be found  
in the space  
between. Amen

**Say the Lord's Prayer** or *Consider this beautiful rendition of the Lord's Prayer from Holy Habits: Prayer*

Father and mother of us all, with us, yet not of this world,  
Your name is precious to us.  
We long to see the world as you would have it,  
As we know it will become,  
But for now, we are thankful for the things we need here today –  
Food, shelter, health, love, and enough to do.  
We know we are not always the people you would like us to be –  
We fail you, ourselves, and each other  
And we are not as forgiving as we could be –  
So we ask that we might know ourselves made new  
And set free to release others from our anger and hurt.  
Though life is full of temptations,  
Help us to stand firm  
And keep us from straying down the wrong paths.  
All this we ask because we know that  
You are the power that keeps us loving,  
Yours is the kingdom we inhabit by faith  
And through us we hope the world will see  
The wonder that is your love and grace. Amen

**Hymn:** 'Forgive our sins as we forgive' (StF 423) - Rosamond Eleanor Herklots (1905–1987)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XihK97wPno> Beautiful sand art video without words.

<p>'Forgive our sins as we forgive,' you taught us, Lord, to pray, but you alone can grant us grace to live the words we say.</p> <p>How can your pardon reach and bless the unforgiving heart that broods on wrongs, and will not let old bitterness depart?</p>	<p>In blazing light your cross reveals the truth we dimly knew, how small the debts are owed to us, how great our debt to you!</p> <p>Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls, and bid resentment cease; then, reconciled by God to all, our lives will spread your peace.</p>
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**Intercessions:**

*Think over the last week or two. What things have happened for which you wish to give thanks to God? What has happened for which you wish to ask God's aid, guidance, or intervention? In the quiet, offer your prayers to God.*

Lord God, creator of all things, you gaze at your creation and declare that it is good. Hear our prayers for healing, guidance, and hope. We look with expectation to the restoration of all things as you make all things new. Amen.

**Hymn:** Let love be real, in giving and receiving (StF 615) - Michael Forster (b. 1946)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfRN5dDkymS>

<p>Let love be real, in giving and receiving, without the need to manage and to own; a haven free from posing and pretending, where every weakness may be safely known. Give me your hand, along the desert pathway, give me your love wherever we may go.</p> <p><i>As God loves us, so let us love each other: with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.</i></p> <p>Let love be real, not grasping or confining, that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;</p>	<p>that helps us face the risk of truly living, and makes us brave to be what we might be. Give me your strength when all my words are weakness; give me your love in spite of all you know.</p> <p>Let love be real, with no manipulation, no secret wish to harness or control; let us accept each other's incompleteness, and share the joy of learning to be whole. Give me your hope through dreams and disappointments; give me your trust when all my failings show.</p>
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**Blessing:**

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you, wherever He may send you.  
May He guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm.  
May He bring you home rejoicing at the wonders He has shown you.  
May He bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors. Amen