

Basingstoke & Reading Circuit Service for Sunday 13th September 2020

Call to Worship: “Today the theme of our service is forgiveness - forgiveness from God & forgiveness to & from each other. We are all equal before God & we should forgive others just as we have been forgiven by God.”

Hymn 463 (H&P)/94 (STF): “To God be the glory, great things He has done.”

1. To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
and opened the life gate that all may go in.

Refrain:

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the people rejoice!

O come to the Father through Jesus the Son,
and give Him the glory, great things He has done!

2. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood!
To every believer the promise of God;
the vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. [Refrain]
3. Great things He has taught us, great things He has done,
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
but purer and higher and greater will be
our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see. [Refrain]

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lord, we thank you that you call us to meet with you & that you call each one of us by name. We come to give you thanks & praise for all your goodness towards us. We thank you, Lord, for teaching us important lessons of life; for patiently encouraging us when we make mistakes. Lord, you gently guide us when we are unsure of the next step. Help us, Lord, to follow in your footsteps & walk beside you daily. Thank you for giving us companions along the way.

You love each one of us, Lord, whoever we are & wherever we are & your love for us compels us to love others & to follow you as your disciples. We thank you, Lord, for the difference each one of us has made to the lives of others. We thank you, Lord, that you come into our lives & you show us the way to live. We thank you for sending us the Holy Spirit so that you remain with us always. Thank you for being with us now, Lord, as we learn what it means to be a follower of you. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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.

Reading: Romans 14:9-19

Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

Hymn 134 (H&P)/423 (STF): “Forgive our sins as we forgive.”

1. 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.
2. How can your pardon reach and bless
The unforgiving heart
That broods on wrongs and will not let
Old bitterness depart?
3. In blazing light your cross reveals
The truth we dimly knew:
What trivial debts are owed to us;
How great our debt to you!
4. Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls
And bid resentment cease;
Then, bound to all in bonds of love
Our lives will spread your peace.

Author: Rosamond Herklots (1969)

Tune: DETROIT (Bradshaw)

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we thank you for your gift of forgiveness. You loved us so much that you sent your only Son to die for us so that we could be forgiven. Your mercy flows to each one of us in spite of our faults and failures. Help us to demonstrate unconditional love today, even to those who hurt us. May your words saturate our minds and direct our thoughts. Help us to love as Jesus loves. If we can be forgiven, so can we forgive one another. There are no levels to your love and we are all your children, loved and accepted. Help us find the compassion that comes with true forgiveness.

Loving God, we come before you, knowing that we have fallen, and you tell us to stand up and walk. We cannot change the past, for what is done is done: but today and tomorrow is your call to us. Support us, Loving God, and help us to be aware of how forgiving you are. Help us to take you at your word when you say, “I forgive you and I love you!” You have come to heal us and make us whole and for this we give you thanks.

Teach us the law of love, Lord. Teach us to be open when doors close. Teach us to be forgiving when we are wronged. Teach us to be understanding when we do not know. Teach us to be just when persecution reigns, Teach us to be truthful when fear clouds our vision. Teach us to be hopeful when despair infects the world. Open our hearts, Lord, to a new dimension of prayer and faith; of love and peace; of reconciliation and understanding; of joyful forgiveness, past and present; of loving respect for the whole of creation.

Lord we acknowledge with shame and sorrow all the sin, hatred and injustice which have led and still lead to violence and war. We pray for our own country and other places in the world where tensions are high, and the peace that is your will seems so far away. We pray that nations and people everywhere may turn to you, the Prince of Peace, so that war and terror, cruelty and hatred, may end and peace and justice, kindness, love and forgiveness, may reign.

We ask this and all our prayers through the precious Name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

[Hymn 139 \(H&P\)/255 \(STF\): “The kingdom of God is justice & joy.”](#)

1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy;
for Jesus restores what sin would destroy.
God's power and glory in Jesus we know
and here and hereafter the kingdom shall
grow.
2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace;
the captives are freed, the sinners find
place,
the outcast are welcomed God's banquet to
share;
and hope is awakened in place of despair.
3. The kingdom of God is challenge and
choice:
believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ to
his cross:
our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.
4. God's kingdom is come, the gift and the
goal;
in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole.
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his
call
and all things cry 'Glory!' to God all in all.

Author: Bryn Rees (1973)

Sermon

Our readings today are all about FORGIVENESS. We are to forgive others the wrongs they do us because God is ready to forgive us all. To be true to the God who loves us & forgives us, we must love & forgive each other.

My text for this morning's sermon is taken from the parable of the 'Unforgiving Servant,' in St Matthew's Gospel Ch.18 & v 33;

“You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you.”

Throughout Christianity there always seems to be those who think they can have the benefits of forgiveness, without letting it make any difference to their lives. We need to avoid resentment towards those who we feel have done us wrong, & even more so, we need to avoid resentment towards those who haven't wronged us, but whom we, for whatever reason, find difficult to accept. The effectiveness of God's forgiveness depends upon our willingness to adopt God's attitude towards all humanity. It is very easy to treat those whom we consider 'outsiders' as if they had done us some kind of wrong. This is what we are doing if we adopt an attitude of prejudice towards them. It is this that leads to discrimination. People whose way of living is different from the majority are often viewed with suspicion & anger. Today's readings make it clear that we are not to allow ourselves to hold anyone in contempt. We are all loved by God, & we respond to that love by loving everyone else, including those whose presence we find inconvenient or even threatening. Someone who has really entered into a new relationship with God, will be ready to treat others in the same way that they have been treated.

A man, thinking he was on his death-bed, sent for an acquaintance with whom he had fallen out years before. He quickly made his peace & the two shook hands. As the visitor left the room the sick man said; “Remember, if ever I get over this, the old quarrel stands!”

Real forgiveness must be from the heart.

“You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you.”

The parable of the Unforgiving Servant brings the love of God & the love required from us, together. It shows us what a difference God's forgiveness makes to our obligations to, & expectations of, one another. The man's behaviour in demanding repayment of the debt from his fellow servant isn't unjust. The fact that it is only a few pounds does not mean it should not be paid! It is only because of what has gone before that he is condemned. The king has written off a debt of unimaginable proportions! The sale of the whole family into slavery would have come nowhere near to meeting it. The act of generosity has brought a new dimension to the situation. The one who has been forgiven, must evidence the same graciousness. When he fails to do so & is condemned, it is not so much that grace has been withdrawn as that he himself refused to accept it.

The parable of the Unforgiving Servant teaches certain lessons that Jesus never tired of teaching. It is in reply to Peter's question; "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?", that Jesus goes on to relate this great parable. Again & again Peter rushed into speech, in such a way, that he drew from Jesus teaching which is immortal. On this occasion Peter thought that he was being very generous when he suggested he should forgive his brother 7 times. Peter expected to be warmly commended; but Jesus' answer to him was that the Christian must forgive 70 x 7 times. In other words, there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness. Jesus then told the story of the servant forgiven a great debt, who went out & showed no mercy to his fellow servant. His fellow servant owed him a debt that was a very small fraction of his own.

"You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you."

This is the teaching which runs through all the N.T. - that a person must forgive just as he has been forgiven by God.

"Blessed are the merciful," said Jesus, "for they shall obtain mercy."

Jesus teaches His disciples His own prayer & goes on to explain that "...if you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done."

Divine & human forgiveness go hand in hand. One of the great points Jesus is making in this parable is the contrast between the two debts. The first servant owed his master 10,000 talents. A talent was equivalent to £240.00, therefore 10,000 talents is £2,400,000. That is an incredible debt! It was more than the total budget of an ordinary province. The total revenue of the province which contained Judea & Samaria was only 600 talents. The total revenue of even a wealthy province like Galilee was only 300 talents. Here was a debt which was greater than a king's ransom. It was this that the servant was forgiven. The debt which a fellow servant owed him was trifling in comparison - it was 100 denarii. A denarius was worth about 4 pence in value, & therefore the total debt was less than £5.00. It was approximately 1/500,000 of his own debt. Someone once drew this vivid picture to contrast the debts. For those of you who can remember pre-decimalisation. Suppose they were paid in sixpences. The 100 denarii debt could be carried in one pocket. The 10,000 talent, or £2,400,000 debt would take to carry it an army of about 8,600 carriers, each carrying a sack of sixpences 60 lbs. in weight. And they would form, at a distance of a yard apart, a line 5 miles long! The contrast between the debts is staggering.

The point of the parable is that nothing others can do to us can in any way compare with what we have done to God; & if God has forgiven us the debt we owe to Him, how much more should we forgive one another. Nothing that we have to forgive can even remotely compare with what we have been forgiven. We have been forgiven a debt which is beyond all paying - for our sin brought about the death of God's own Son. We are all called to live for Jesus Christ - God's own Son. Since we all belong to Christ, we must never pass judgement on each other or treat each other with contempt.

The reading from St Matthew's Gospel calls us to be generous in our forgiveness of one another, remembering how much we ourselves have been forgiven. We are all called to accept each other in Christian love. Though we may try to follow Jesus' teachings, treating others as we would be treated ourselves, there are times when we fail. We quite often point out other people's faults instead of addressing their needs. We pre-judge others & fail to treat all people as equal, as they are in God's eyes. We need to give thanks for our God-given diversity & remember that we are all equally God's children. It is easy for people to feel threatened by human diversity instead of welcoming it. We should never look down on others, but always look up towards a future where we can enjoy the diversity of our world in peace & with understanding.

May the Lord give us courage to reach out where there is intolerance & fear, so that we may spread peace, understanding & forgiveness within our own communities.

Have mercy on one another, just as God has had mercy on us.

"Tis mercy all, immense & free;" Amen.

