

13th September 20 – Sandhurst & Yateley

Welcome

<https://youtu.be/04N3PwPqdj0>

Call to worship & opening prayer

<https://youtu.be/ImJpqZFoC60>

1st hymn: S of F 28 As we are gathered

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCdD5Ouq-2Q>

Prayer of thanksgiving

<https://youtu.be/7kTd0WkWjJM>

Reading: Matthew 18: 21 – 35 The unforgiving servant

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Od41RNwxYnQ>

Message

https://youtu.be/F9uDq6r_T0s

2nd hymn: STF 424 God forgave my sin (Freely, freely)

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

Prayers of intercession and Lord's Prayer

https://youtu.be/2cdwj9F_yM8

3rd hymn: STF 440 Amazing grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XT0JvdAktNU>

Blessing:

<https://youtu.be/UNtD6AgJx08>

May God's light guide you.

May his hand support you.

May his love surround you, and

May you be an instrument of his peace today and always. Amen

Share the grace:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Call to Worship: Psalm 90: 1 - 4

Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to another.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or the earth and the world were formed
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
You turn us back to dust and say,
“Turn back O children of earth.”
For a thousand ages in your sight are but as yesterday
which passes like a watch in the night.

Come to God, in the company of the righteous
And name yourself among them
As one whose life is touched by faith.

Draw close to God, with those whose lives are upright
And name yourself among them
As one whose heart is touched by love.

Call upon God, along with those who believe
And name yourself among them
As one whose soul is touched by the Holy Spirit.

Opening prayer:

Lord God, our heavenly Father, always-faithful One,
we ask that you will be present now
with ALL who would worship you this day,
those gathered here and those in their homes not able to be with us,
those with close links to this church
and those whose lives just touch upon it.
Bless us, we pray, open our ears to hear you, our voices to praise you
and our hearts to know you better. **Amen**

Prayer of thanksgiving:

Lord, for the wonders of your Creation, we praise and adore you.
For these mellow days of late summer ripeness,
For mornings heavy in dew, with mists over ponds and lakes,
For the lazy warmth in the middle of the day
Reminding us we haven't quite said goodbye to summer.
We praise and adore you.

For evenings cool with promise of autumn,
our breath white in the air,
For the brightness of the stars at night,
For the welcome warmth of home as the darkness draws in around us,
we thank you.

For the love of our families and the companionship of our friends,
That you have made us so that we need others
and are not happy in isolation,
That you have given us the capacity to love and be loved,
We praise and adore you.

That you call us into relationship with you,
That you are ever there, a whisper in our ear
A touch on our heart,
That there is no place we can go and you not be there,
Lord, we thank you – and we love you. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving God, we praise you that you are not like the man
who refused to forgive, even though he himself had been forgiven.
We praise you that you are a just God,
who always forgives our sins when we truly repent.

Forgiving God, we thank you for forgiving us
when we say sorry to you: again, again, and for ever.
Please show us how to be ready to say sorry to you,
and to each other: again, again, and for ever.
Please teach us more about your wonderful forgiving love.

Lord Jesus, your wounds were deeper than our imaginings,
your love is beyond our comprehension.
You gave your life for us, help us to offer our lives to you,
And in the service of all our neighbours.

And so we bring you our prayers for ourselves and for others:
Lord God we pray for our world.

Especially at this time we pray for all who are affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. For those who have been ill because of it, for those who are ill with it right now, for those who have lost loved ones through it, for those who are vulnerable and whose lives are affected by their need to be shielded from it, for those who have lost jobs or businesses because of its affect. We pray for all those who have felt, or continue to feel, isolated or alone.

We pray for our government for wisdom in dealing with the situation –
may they listen to the wise advice of others, may they be able to discern
your voice through others.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for those who are sick – in body, mind or spirit.
We pray for those who love and care for them:
For family and friends, for doctors and nurses and support workers,
That all might know your love.

We especially bring before you today:
Mick Malone, Heleen Devanand (needing to be shielded still from Covid19), Frankie Hiron, Colin Johnson, Mike and Ann Wearing, Matthew and Family (Sue T's Colleague), Heather and Family (Sue T's Colleague), Sonia Walton, Terry and Joyce Chappell, Bill & Diane Knight, Roy and Audrey Gamlin, Jessie Hazelden, Judith Sutherland, Auriole Hill

We also remember a young lady called Claudia, the niece of Heather and Douglas' neighbour, who was involved in a serious motorbike accident and is now in a coma and has had to have major face structural repair.
Lord, may your healing touch be on each person we have named and others known to us who we name before you silently in our hearts.....
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who are grieving and ask that they may be aware of your love surrounding and comforting them.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we offer these prayers in the name of your Son, our Lord Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

We join together now in saying **the Lord's Prayer.**

Our Father, who art in heaven.....

Sermon:

There is an extravagance in the numbers in this parable. It is deliberate. Because what this passage is really teaching us is first and foremost, about God's love and forgiveness and, secondly, about how we should respond in the light of having received it.

Our gospel passage begins with Peter's sincere question to Jesus – how many times should I forgive someone who has done me wrong? It harks back to the previous verses (last week's lectionary) where Jesus had been teaching the disciples about how to deal with wrongdoing in the Church and how to effect reconciliation. Peter raises a practical issue: how often should I forgive someone who has done me wrong?

Peter then suggests an answer himself – seven times? Seven is generous. The rabbinical standard was three, the idea being that God forgives three sins and punishes the fourth. Peter senses that Jesus wants the disciples to extend themselves even further, so he doubles the standard and then adds one for good measure.

But Jesus' response blows that out of the water! Not seven times but seventy-seven times (or as some of you will be aware other translations say seventy times seven which would be 490). 77 is probably the more accurate translation but the point has nothing to do with maths!

Jesus does not give us a math-lesson, but a grace-lesson. He is not inviting us to keep careful records but is setting a standard that makes record-keeping impractical. Who can truly forgive seventy times seven—or even 77 times—while keeping track? Who can forget the other person's sins while putting chalk marks on the wall? To keep track is not to forgive but is rather to record progress toward the day when we can quit forgiving.

Jesus goes on to try to explain this extravagance of forgiveness in the parable and immediately we come across yet more enormous numbers:

Fifty million silver coins! Different translations have different amounts here but the point in all of them is not what the actual debt was that the official owed but that it **was completely unrepayable**. A debt too large to be paid... Can we even begin to imagine what that would be like?

Well, there are some people in life who possibly can.....

- Gamblers where the addiction has cost them their car, their job, their home and probably the love and respect of their family.
- Those who have borrowed unwisely from loan sharks, perhaps in moments of extreme need, intending always to repay at some point but being crippled by the cruel interest rates, borrowing more to repay the original debt until they are at the bottom of a pit of debt from which they cannot climb out without help from another.
- Those who have faced desperation due to circumstances beyond their control: loss of job, defaulting on mortgage repayments.
- Those who have had to declare themselves bankrupt or else face imprisonment – who will go forward in life but always with a black mark against their name and the knowledge that they left creditors with unrepaid debts.

These may not have been our own experiences – for which we should be grateful to God – but we may know of those who have faced such dire straits and we may have heard of others who have taken their own lives because they could see no way out from their pit of despair.

But in this parable what happens? Initially the king appears about to impose the usual sentence – the man and his immediate family to be sold into slavery. That would have taken the rest of their lives and those of their children's children because there was no way such a debt could be discharged in their lifetimes. But the official pleads for mercy and promises to repay every bit of the money – something he clearly couldn't do and the king would have known it. It was an empty promise on the official's part

but he was desperate and the king is moved to compassion. Not only does the king release the official, he writes off his debt. That's it, done. Paid there is nothing left for the official to do. He has a clean sheet, a fresh start.

Billy Graham used to tell a story of how he was stopped for speeding and in the courtroom he pleaded guilty and was fully expecting a fine. The judge, he said, was not only friendly but embarrassed for Billy to be in his court. But if he let Billy go free it would have been inconsistent with justice. The penalty had to be paid either by him or someone else! The judge had no choice but to set the fine. However, when Billy went to pay it at the close of the proceedings, he found that the fine had already been paid on his behalf – by the judge! Billy used that story to illustrate the redemption we receive through Christ – that we are convicted but that Jesus has paid the price of our sin - and that's what this parable is about too. It's not about money but about the debt of sin which separates each and every one of us from God – a debt that we, ourselves, can never pay.

Yet, through the work of Jesus on the cross, we who place ourselves at the mercy of God, recognising our own bankruptcy, are released from the punishment for sin. Jesus pays our debt and we are given a completely fresh start, a new life, a clean sheet. We have been forgiven everything so what should our response be?

This is the point of the next part of the parable. What does the forgiven servant do? He goes out and immediately tries to extract the money that another owes him. Note just how vast the difference between the two debts – the official's debt was unpayable, this debt that he is owed is meagre. It could be paid back given a little time. Indeed, with his own experience fresh in his mind, the official should have forgiven this other servant the entire debt yet, when *he* is begged for mercy, for more time, he shows no pity or mercy whatsoever and instead condemns the official to jail – and who can earn money to repay a debt whilst imprisoned?

When the king hears, he is furious – angrier than ever he was about the earlier debt. He's angry because the official, having received mercy and forgiveness should have been merciful and forgiving in turn.

And that's the challenge for us. It's not that we shouldn't take sin seriously, in this case the sin of others, or that we should turn a blind eye. It's not that we should throw out the court system of the land. Nor is it that we should expect *others* who have been wronged to forgive. Forgiveness – true forgiveness - is never easy and is not a one-stop moment but a process. Only those who have been wronged can forgive – we can't forgive on their behalf but we can pray for all parties involved.

However, when it is a wrong that has been done to us, *that's* when we need to search our hearts as to our response.

There's a Christian song that defines mercy and grace:

Mercy is when God *doesn't* give us what we deserve.

Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve.

Each one of us is a sinner before God. We are in need of his mercy and grace and if, by that grace, we have been forgiven, then we should seek to forgive those who have wronged us.

May God remind us of the enormous debt *we* owe and have been released from and give us his strength and grace to go and do as he has done for us. Amen.