

**THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:  
Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020  
Trinity 14**

The service for today has been prepared by Liz Howlett and can also be accessed by phone on **01308 293062**.

***The Greeting***

Welcome to this service for the Bride Valley churches. It is good to know that we are joining together in worship this morning in homes and churches around the valley. Although separated physically, yet we are united through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

***Psalm 103: 1-4***

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgives all your sins and heals all your infirmities; who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with faithful love and compassion.

***Invitation to Confession***

We come together to receive the forgiveness of a new day.

**We come together to rejoice in the freedom to begin again.**

We come together to receive mercy from our heavenly Father.

***Prayers of Penitence***

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart.

Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

***Absolution***

May the God of love bring *us* back to himself, forgive *us* our sins, and assure *us* of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

***The 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.**

***Old Testament Reading***

Genesis 50:15-21

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I

beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

### ***The Gospel Reading***

Matthew 18:21-35

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?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 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. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 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.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 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. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

### ***Reflection***

What a challenging way of life it is to be a follower of Christ!

Forgiveness – the theme we are focussing on in our bible readings for today – is at the heart of our faith. It has been reckoned that almost two thirds of Jesus' teaching is directly or indirectly about forgiveness. The little snatch of conversation between Peter and Jesus at the beginning of the gospel reading is an example which reveals what forgiveness is about. Perhaps we can imagine a smile on Jesus' face as he responds to Peter's question about how many times he must forgive a brother or sister. Peter thinks there may be a limit – that can be entirely understandable – how maddening it is when someone does the same 'wrong' thing time after time – even small things such as leaving the fridge door open, or walking mud in from the garden, or young siblings squabbling in the back seat of the car – you will have many examples come to mind I am sure. The smile may be on Jesus' face when he responds to Peter with a much bigger number – not seven times but seventy-seven times. Jesus is saying that forgiveness is not about counting and reaching a limit – what he is saying is much more about the fact that forgiveness is about mercy, God's overflowing mercy, which has no limit.

Joseph's brothers, in our old testament reading, were really worried that Joseph's mercy on them would have a limit – when their father, Jacob, died, their fear was that Joseph's mercy and forgiveness would turn to revenge, to get them back for the awful crime they committed years ago, selling him into slavery into Egypt and persuading their father that he had been killed by a wild animal. They had acted out of jealousy and anger towards their bumptious younger brother who had been their father's favourite all that time ago and now they were in his power – which way would he turn? I wonder if you have ever felt yourself in that position where 'the tables have been turned' and revenge was a real choice. I wonder, for example, how often grown up children have sensed, even if momentarily, 'It's my turn now!', when their parents have become the ones who are dependent on them for their care and support. Joseph

has had many years to reflect on what happened to him and he can see a bigger picture and has a greater vision of God at work, even through the terrible thing that his brothers did to him and so he can weep with them and reassure them that he will take care of them.

This attitude is so different from that of the first slave in the parable we heard earlier. He receives extraordinary mercy from his lord – his debt never would have been repayable, not in a million years! Yet he has no sense of his own position as a person needing mercy – when he comes to deal with a fellow slave who owes him a trifling amount, he is merciless, throwing him into jail until his debt is paid. We are all in need of mercy – we are all in the same boat – this is where we start from, this is why forgiveness is at the heart of God's dealings with us and our approach to one another.

This reflection began with the statement that following Christ is a challenging way of life. One of the reasons for saying this is the awareness that as forgiveness is so central to our faith, as we have already explored – (and every time we say the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to forgive us as we forgive others) – as it is so central, there can be a huge pressure to rush to use words of forgiveness and ignore the wrong that has been done. It would not be right to suggest, for example, that our faith requires that a person continues to leave themselves open to abuse because they must 'forgive' their abuser every time. The wrong needs to be addressed as well, for everyone's sake – for both the victim and the wrongdoer and also for the wider community. One of the most impressive examples of this took place in South Africa, when apartheid came to an end in the nineties. The black majority in the country had been oppressed over many years and this could have been an opportunity for revenge on a huge scale. However, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up to hear the stories of injustice, to address the wrongs that had been committed and to enable some sort of restorative justice. It was widely reckoned to have been successful and certainly helped prevent the new country descend into total violence and chaos.

Forgiveness, therefore, is not something to be used like a sticking plaster, covering up a wound that needs to be open to the light of day so that it can be healed. Forgiveness, rather, is a challenging way of life, founded on the recognition that we are all in the same boat, in need of God's unlimited mercy, which is offered to us by and through Christ, our brother and saviour.

Some more words from Psalm 103 to finish:

The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed... The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love... He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

Amen.

### ***Prayers***

Jesus said: 'Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.'

Saviour, we hear your call.

**Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Unless you change and become humble like little children, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Saviour, we hear your call.

**Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Be merciful as your Father is merciful; love your enemies and do good to them.'

Saviour, we hear your call.

**Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Love one another, as I love you;  
there is no greater love than this,  
to lay down your life for your friends.'  
Saviour, we hear your call.  
**Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Go to people everywhere  
and make them my disciples,  
and I will be with you always, to the end of time.'  
Saviour, we hear your call.  
**Help us to follow.**

God of mercy,  
**you know us and love us  
and hear our prayer:  
keep us in the fellowship of  
Jesus Christ our Saviour.  
Amen.**

### ***The Lord's Prayer***

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
On earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory  
For ever and ever. Amen**

### ***Final Prayer***

**Lord God, the source of truth and love,  
keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,  
united in prayer and the breaking of bread,  
and one in joy and simplicity of heart,  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### ***Blessing***

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with you  
and guide you on your way at every change and turn;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be among *you* and remain with *you* always.  
**Amen.**

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Invitation to Confession adapted from *Praying with the Earth: a prayerbook for peace*, John Philip Newell, Canterbury Press (2011)