

WORSHIP SUNDAY 13TH SEPTEMBER 2020

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, on the cross you forgave all those who harmed you, opened your arms for us and welcomed us into your Kingdom. May your saving power be known amongst us, and lead us into the way of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit in everlasting love. Amen

The Lord be with you:

ALL: and also with you.

Hymn: Dear Lord and Father of mankind forgive our foolish ways.

READING: ADELE: GENESIS 50:15-21 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.

ANNIE: When we hear the end of the story of Joseph and his family it is easy to forget that Joseph was 17 when he was thrown into the pit and 41 years old when true reconciliation came to this troubled family.

SECOND READING BY ADELE: MATTHEW 18:21-35 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, canceled 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 canceled 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

Today’s readings are all about forgiveness. Jesus spent the vast majority of his ministry both healing and often at the same time, forgiving people, so it must be important. Indeed, there is a real connection between forgiveness and healing. It is good for all parties concerned and is part of the Gospel plan for our world.

We need to remember that forgiveness is not always easy, or perhaps even possible without the grace of God. After being wronged, few human beings can move ahead with dignity without a full and honest exposure of the truth, as well as accountability. You cannot heal what you do not acknowledge. Hurt does not just go away on its own; it needs to be spoken and heard and justice needs to be seen to be done.

In our Gospel reading we hear about the servant who was forgiven his own debt but did not forgive and indeed dealt harshly with the person who owed him money. His master was not pleased and, “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.”

So often we think of justice as punishment and indeed we often do have to suffer the consequences of our wrong doing. God may forgive the shoplifter but the judge will still send the thief to prison.

For God though this is not the end of the story, because if we read our bibles carefully, we will see that God’s full plan for justice is one of restoration for all.

Ultimately God’s justice seeks to transform broken lives, relationships, and communities, rather than shatter them further. A justice that seeks reconciliation, rather than a deepening of conflict. And for this to happen there needs to be acknowledgement of wrong doing, forgiveness and justice, and at its very best restorative justice. A justice that seeks not to punish, but to heal. A justice, that is not about getting even, but about getting well.

We see this so clearly in our Genesis reading today about Joseph and his brothers. Just to recap in case you have forgotten the full story, Joseph had a pretty rough time of it! Thrown into a pit at 17 by his brothers who, jealous and angry with him, sold him into slavery. Being a good lad, he rose in authority in the household of Potiphar only to be wrongly accused of seduction by his master’s wife.

Thrown into prison, he interprets dreams asking the Kings cup bearer to put in a good word for him on his predicted release. This cup bearer promptly forgets for two years until he is reminded by the King needing someone to interpret dreams.

Our Hero Joseph gets the interpretation right and is not only freed from prison but gets promotion to high office overseeing the collection, distribution and saving of the harvest for the coming famine. He gets a wife thrown in for good measure.

Then the famine comes and his family turn up to buy grain. Joseph recognises them but they as yet do not know who Joseph is. Notice, as of yet, the brothers are not repentant for what they did. I suspect they had put it to the very back of their minds, as is so easy with our own wrong doing.

Joseph is not yet at the point of forgiveness, although he does do a lot of private crying. Remember this is almost 30 years since Joseph was thrown into the pit – healing can take a long time.

He accuses his brothers of being spies and throws them all into prison for a couple of days. Maybe he is acting out understandably human anger and revenge? We don't really know.

Releasing them, Joseph insists that one of them be kept in prison until they come back with their youngest brother to prove they are honest men. It is at this point the brothers begin to feel anxious and remember what they had previously done to their father's younger son and frankly don't want to put dad through all that again. In short, they are beginning to feel guilt.

To cut a long story short, the brothers two years later come back with their youngest brother Benjamin to buy more grain.

This time Joseph plants a silver cup in Benjamin's sack and as the brothers are on their way back home, they are arrested and told the one who has the cup will become a slave to Joseph.

This is when the brothers really get guilt and Judah offers to take Benjamin's place and speaks of his father's broken heart over the loss of Joseph.

At this point Joseph breaks down and revealing who he is tells the brothers not to be angry with themselves for what they had done and that it was God who sent me ahead of you.... in preparation to save all of you from this famine.

Later Joseph's dad Israel comes to see Joseph and ultimately Joseph cares for his whole family (over sixty people by this time) and gives them a place to live in safety and with food.

Fundamentally, this view of wrong doing, implies a concern for healing of all those involved—those directly harmed, those who cause harm, and their communities.

In the Hebrew scriptures, this is embedded in the concept of shalom, the vision of living in a sense of "all-rightness" with each other, with the creator, and with the environment.

If we read, especially the Prophets (Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea) carefully we will see that God's justice is restorative.

In each case, after the prophet chastises the Israelites for their transgressions against YHWH, the prophet continues by saying, in effect, "And here's what YHWH will do for you:

God will now love you more than ever! God will love you into wholeness. God will pour upon you a gratuitous, unbelievable, unaccountable, irrefutable love that you will finally be unable to resist.”

God “punishes” us by loving us more! How else could divine love be supreme and victorious?

For Love is the only thing that transforms the human heart. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways” (Isaiah 55:8).

As we see in Josephs story sin and failure are an opportunity for the transformation of the person harmed, the person causing harm, and the community.

So, let us be encouraged and as a wise woman once told me when I was having difficulty forgiving someone, simply say to God I forgive them because that is what you want me to do. I do not as yet feel that forgiveness in my heart, but I trust that you will do the work in me to make that possible. And, of course, God did change my heart but not immediately!

This enabled both myself and the other person to develop freely in the love of God. **Amen**

PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

Dear Lord help us to have forgiving hearts and to seek healing for all when we have been hurt. In the quiet of our hearts we bring before you those things we have done that cause offence and the things we have not done that we ought to have done. **Amen**

MEDITATION/ LECTIO DEVINA : A PRAYER OF DAVID PSALM 103

For those at home please read the below slowly twice through and allow yourself to be spoken to by God. If any word or phrase catches your attention then feel free to linger over this. Speak to God about what come to mind.

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION LED BY LOIS

Our heavenly Father,

We thank you for your son Jesus, who died for our sin. Thank you that we can approach your throne with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Thank you that in you there is forgiveness. Please forgive us for our sin – for those times when we have thought or acted in selfish, unloving ways.

Help us forgive others and ourselves as you forgive us, so we can be channels of your love and forgiveness to others.

We pray for our government and the governments of the world in these challenging times, that you would give them wisdom in decision- making, that they might govern with compassion and justice.

We pray today for Nazarin Zhagari -Ratcliffe, who is a prisoner of conscience in Iran, separated from her husband and young daughter and is due to face a further charge and hearing in an Iranian court today, after nearly five years imprisonment. We pray for her and other prisoners of conscience, their families and others who support them and work for their release, that you might sustain them and that they may find hope in you. We pray for compassion for those considering their cases.

We pray for lecturers, tutors, university chaplains, other staff and students starting at colleges and universities in the coming weeks– for wisdom and compliance in carrying out their work with COVID-19 measures in place and for the safety and wellbeing of all.

We also pray for the safety and wellbeing of those living and working in our communities.

We pray for those who are separated from loved ones, those who are sick, those who are bereaved, those struggling with work or financial problems or relationship difficulties, for your comfort and help in their time of need. In a moment of quiet we pray for those known to us in need of your comfort and help at this time.

Please guide your church in being a beacon of your hope, love, compassion.

We ask these prayers in Jesus name. **Amen.**

HYMN THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD.

FINAL PRAYER

O Great Love, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other's burdens and the weight of glory. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our world. Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God, **Amen.**

BLESSING

May the Lord bless you and keep you and make His face to shine upon you and bring you His peace. **Amen**