

Weekly Worship
The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
13th September 2020
All Saints, Kings Heath

WELCOME

Rev Canon David Warbrick

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,

All: and all that is within me bless his holy name.

(Psalm 103:1)

Thank you for welcoming us into your home for this time of prayer and exploration.

All Saints Kings Heath serves a fairly bohemian suburb of south Birmingham, standing at a busy junction on our tatty but loveable High Street. Long before I pitched up, the congregation here has worked with many neighbours of good will to conceive and build a Medical Centre, Community Centre, Youth Centre and Older People's Day Centre, joined firmly on to the Victorian Church building where the altar, you could say, is *the* centre that reminds us everywhere is the centre of God's loving attention. I'm very fortunate to be Vicar for such a community, which includes Nicola Slee, poet and Theologian.

Our readings today prompt us to reflect on how difficult it is *being* forgiven. We hope they will prepare us for a confession towards the end of the service.

As we begin, a prayer for the week:

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.

All: Amen.

HYMN

Dear Lord and Father of Mankind

Performed by the choir of All Saints Kings Heath

Dear Lord and father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives thy service find,
In deeper reverence praise.
In deeper reverence praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow thee.
Rise up and follow thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!
Interpreted by love!

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.
The beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind and fire;
O still small voice of calm.
O still small voice of calm.

Words: J.G.Whittier (1807-92)

Tune: Repton

YOUTH PROJECT

Ian Barber, family support coordinator

Here in the All Saints Youth Project, Ian assists many families through courses helping to handle conflict. I wonder, Ian, without breaking confidences, if you have seen examples of reconciliation in your work?

I could probably give many examples to be honest with you, but it's been a tough time for everybody and it's been a challenging time for me having to work from home, because I'm used to that face to face contact. But for many of the parents, being able to continue the services that we have done, like the one to one through Zoom, through WhatsApp, telephone contacts over the lockdown period. What came out of that was the parents were very appreciative of that we were probably one of the few services that were continued to offer support, not just to themselves, but to their children, whereas others had shut down, and they'd had very little contact with. But what came out of it was, is that a lot of them were very anxious about being at home on their own, even though they'd got other family members, some of them in the families, being locked down on their own with their children, and having to deal with them for the first time in many years, on their own, because when they went to school it was a bit of time out for those parents to recharge their batteries, as much as it was for the children to have an outlet and a regular routine within the school environment. But what came out of it were that many parents were saying at the time was that they learnt to understand, and build a better relationship with their children, they had to start to spend time with them, where time was very limited before. And were actually beginning to enjoy their children again, and also say that some of the anxieties that the young people were experiencing, whether that be about, you know, having to go into school, having to deal with their own additional needs, began to be less and less, and the children were managing their own behaviours because the parents were actually understanding them far more, with the support and advice and working together, we were able to get them through some very difficult times.

Well, we read of a very dysfunctional family in the Bible, and it would be lovely if you'd read for us now the climax of their story from the book of Genesis.

OLD TESTAMENT READING

Genesis 50:15-21

Read by Ian Barber, family support coordinator

Realising 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." And in this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

SONG

Here is love, vast as the ocean

Performed by the choir of All Saints Kings Heath

Here is love, vast as the ocean

Loving kindness as the flood

When the Prince of Life, our Ransom

Shed for us His precious blood

Who His love will not remember?

Who can cease to sing His praise?

He can never be forgotten

Throughout Heaven's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion

Fountains opened deep and wide

Through the floodgates of God's mercy

Flowed a vast and gracious tide

Grace and love, like mighty rivers

Poured incessant from above

And Heaven's peace and perfect justice

Kissed a guilty world in love.

PSALM 103

You remember the story. The half-brothers loathed Joseph's arrogance and resented him being Dad's favourite. Persuaded by Reuben not to kill him, they sold him into slavery. Coming to Egypt for help during a famine, who should they find in charge of the whole country but Joseph. He forgave them, but now their father was gone, they realised they didn't really trust that forgiveness. Their shame and guilt lingered horribly. They haven't forgiven themselves. Their sense of powerlessness continued. Joseph was hurt that they still didn't quite trust his forgiveness and comforted them by reminding them of the divine perspective: even as a powerful civil servant, he was just a man like them. We're all under God's judgement and God is the merciful one who dreams of reconciliation and makes good things come out of the terrible mess we make.

I wonder if you've ever found it hard to forgive yourself. I wonder if you've ever felt inhibited by shame.

We say together some verses from Psalm 103, where vibrant thanksgiving combined, ironically with a candid acceptance of mortality, is offered as an antidote to our mistrust.

Join in the words in bold:

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
**All: and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.**

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
All: and do not forget all his benefits

who forgives all your iniquity
All: who heals all your diseases,

who satisfies you with good as long as you live
All: so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The LORD is merciful and gracious,
All: slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always accuse,
All: nor will he keep his anger for ever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins,
All: nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
All: so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him;

as far as the east is from the west,
All: so far he removes our transgressions from us.

As a father has compassion for his children,
All: so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

For he knows how we are made;
All: he remembers that we are dust.

As for mortals, their days are like grass;
All: they flourish like a flower of the field;

for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
All: and its place knows it no more.

But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,
All: and his righteousness to children's children.

Bless the LORD, all his works,
All: Bless the LORD, O my soul.

GOSPEL READING

Matthew 18:21-35

Read by Debra Osinaike

Then Peter came and said to Jesus, '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 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 should 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 have had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should 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.'

This is the word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

Rev Canon David Warbrick

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We affirm our faith:

**All: We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

INTERCESSIONS

Led by Professor Nicola Slee

In confidence and trust, let us pray to our God:

For those who forgive us time without number,
who mediate your steadfast covenant love to us:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For those who long to know forgiveness
yet cannot receive it, through shame or guilt or fear:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For those who clean up our messes,
whose dirty work we despise and yet rely on daily:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For the patient, long-suffering earth, the multitudinous seas and rivers, the astonishing variety of plants
and animals, which absorb our hubris and suffer our rampaging greed:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For countries and communities enslaved in debt,
for nations paying the price of colonialism and aggressive foreign policy:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For those caught in despairing cycles of addiction, punishment, violence and self-recrimination, and for
those who stand with them to show them a better way:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For those caught in dead end jobs or hopeless unemployment, or in work that squeezes every last ounce of energy out of them, each longing for release:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For those in our law-courts, prisons, probation services and community centres, working for justice and restitution in an imperfect, under-resourced system:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For those whose sickness of mind or body is at least partly caused through an inability to forgive themselves or receive the forgiveness of others, and for all who seek to minister to them:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For our bishops and clergy, lay leaders and teachers, that they may be as ready to receive as to offer forgiveness, that they may be quick to confess and repent of wrong-doing and lead the way in acts of reconciling service:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For our churches and local communities, that they may be places of lavish grace, pardon and acceptance, where sinners know themselves to be in good company with others, where all depend upon the goodness and mercy of God:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For ourselves and those we live with daily and love most dearly, that we may grow in our capacity to forgive and be forgiven, and thus be prepared more nearly for the joyous life of heaven: and for our brothers and sisters, freed in God's abundant forgiveness, who have gone before us:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

A prayer by Janet Morley:

God our redeemer,
you have promised
liberation for our world:
remission of debts,
forgiveness of sins.
Deliver us, body, mind and spirit
from the grip of all that is evil;
and may we who claim the blessing of release
have courage to live by it,
in the name of him who died to set us free,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ANTHEM

'Come unto Him'

From the Messiah, by G. F Handel

Performed by Clare Noakes

*Come unto Him all ye that labour,
Come unto Him ye that are heavy laden, and He will give you rest.*

*Come unto Him, all ye that labour, come unto Him,
ye that are heavy laden, and He will give you rest.*

*Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart,
and ye shall find rest, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

*Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart,
and ye shall find rest, and ye shall find rest, unto your souls.*

At last, we come unto God and confess:

KYRIE CONFESSION

Ukrainian Kyrie

Led by Professor Nicola Slee

Your love for us is abundant and everlasting,
yet we turn away in fear and shame, expecting only punishment.

Your love removes our sins as far as the east is from the west
yet we insist on keeping them close.

Sung Kyrie eleison

Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison.

Your love releases us from every debt
yet we resist your freedom, preferring imprisonment.

Your love forgives us seventy times seven, time without number,
yet we keep the score of others' wrongs.

Sung Christe eleison

Christe eleison, Christe eleison, Christe eleison.

Your love for us is new every morning
yet we cling on to old hurts and grievances.

Your love longs to embrace us as your kith and kin
yet we are suspicious and wary and hold you at arms' length.

Sung Kyrie eleison

Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison.

ABSOLUTION

The God of love and power forgive you
free you from your sins,
heal and strengthen you by his Spirit
and raise you to new life in Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bless the Lord and forget not all his benefits;

All: who forgives all our sins.

As far as the east is from the west,

All: so far has God set your sins from us.

(Psalm 103:2,3a;12)

Sometimes we are surprised by a forgiveness we didn't know we needed.

POEM

The mothers of Srebrenica

Read by Professor Nicola Slee

In March 2018 I was privileged to take part in a women's delegation to Bosnia. I was a guest of the British Charity, 'Remembering Srebrenica'. The massacre of thousands of boys and men, and the systematic rape of many women in rape camps during the Bosnian war in the mid-1990s remains one of the most shameful episodes in European twentieth century history.

Srebrenica is the site of the largest, not the only massacre, where the UN forces, so small, were completely overpowered by the Serbian army, and about 8000 men and boys were massacred. Many of their bodies have now been recovered and are buried in the rather beautiful and serene cemetery at Srebrenica. And the UN base itself remains as a ghostly, largely empty memorial to that terrible atrocity.

It was there that I met one of the mothers of Srebrenica, a group of now quite elderly women, who lost sons, fathers, other male relatives, and may well themselves been raped in some of those rape camps.

They keep watch in a little kiosk opposite the memorial garden, selling knick-knacks and talking to people about their lost relatives.

The mothers of Srebrenica

*In the kiosk selling souvenirs, opposite the cemetery,
I meet one of the mothers. She speaks no English
and I, of course, have no Bosnian. Her face –
the face of grandmothers of every race, generation
and religion – gazes into my sixty-year-old face,
her eyes into my sad eyes. She beholds me
with an infinite gentleness containing not one jot
of blame or recrimination. We hold each others'
hands, hug each other lightly. She speaks
to me of the prices of postcards and sewn items,
and it is the most exquisite poetry pouring over
my head and bathing me in forgiveness. I need
no translator to tell me her story, or she mine.
Each to each, in a place far out beyond language,
we become mothers to the motherless, in the kiosk
opposite the parking bay at the U.N. safe haven
where eight and a half thousand finally rest in peace.*

(21.iii.18)

CONCLUSION

Personal and international conflicts over identity swirling around us, we close with a deceptively simple song whose apparently naïve tune and repetition emphasise acceptance, dissolve enmity and fear of difference, and accumulate gravity until we realise it doesn't really get more important than this.

SONG

Dignity and Grace

Performed by the choir of All Saints Kings Heath

When I receive the peace of Christ
my loneliness shall end;
and I must reach a hand and take
my brother as a friend,
my brother as a friend indeed
who has an honoured place
where he may stand before the Lord
in dignity and grace.

When I receive the peace of Christ
my loneliness shall end;
and I must reach a hand and take
my sister as a friend,
my sister as a friend indeed
who has an honoured place
where she may stand before the Lord
in dignity and grace.

When I receive the peace of Christ
my loneliness shall end;
and I must reach a hand and take
my own self as a friend,
my own self as a friend indeed
who has an honoured place
where I may stand before the Lord
in dignity and grace.

When I receive the peace of Christ
my loneliness shall end;
and I must reach a hand and take
Christ Jesus as a friend,
Christ Jesus as a friend indeed
who has an honoured place
where now he stands amongst us all
in dignity and grace.

*Words: Michael Mair
Tune: Dignity and Grace*

THE BLESSING

Rev Canon David Warbrick

We invite you, after the blessing, to give yourself some time and space for an act of kindness to yourself. Perhaps your hands are suffering from all the caustic hand gel we're required to use. You could anoint them with something fragrant or soothing. Or perhaps you could anoint your feet, or maybe bathe. Whatever treat you choose, feel its sacramental weight. Let it be a bodily sign of your human grace in trusting God's grace towards you.

Christ crucified draw you to himself to find in him a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope and the assurance of sins forgiven, and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

All: Amen.

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