

**Dorset South & West Methodist Circuit Written Service, Sunday 13th September 2020**  
**Education Sunday. The Lesson - Forgiveness. Prepared by Revd Jean Quick**

**StF 113.**

O worship the King, all-glorious above;  
O gratefully sing his power and his love:  
our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,  
pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.

O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,  
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;  
his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,  
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

The earth with its store of wonders untold,  
Almighty, your power has founded of old;  
established it fast by a changeless decree,  
and round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?  
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;  
it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,  
and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,  
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail;  
your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,  
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

O measureless Might, ineffable Love,  
while angels delight to hymn you above,  
your ransomed creation, though feeble our praise,  
in true adoration our voices we raise.

Robert Grant (1779-1838)

**Prayer of Adoration**

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—

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

who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

who satisfies you with good as long as you live. (Psalm 103:1-5 NRSV)

Lord I have so much to be grateful for. You bless me and continually bless me and I echo the psalmist's words as I offer my prayer of adoration and thanksgiving for all your many blessings. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession.**

Lord as I dare to put in the balance all that you have blessed me with this week and weigh it up with what I have offered in return to you or to others. I am sadly lacking.

Forgive my lack of action, lack of compassion, lack of patience.

I thank you for the psalmist's words which reminds me that:-

The Lord is merciful and gracious,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always accuse,

nor will he keep his anger forever.

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.

As a father has compassion for his children,

so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. Amen.  
(Psalm 103:8-13 NRSV)

**The Gospel Reading: Matthew 18:21-35...NRSV. Forgiveness**

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.

**The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**

"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. Obsessed with numbers.**

In our strange way of living at this time, do you find yourself obsessed with numbers? How many people can meet together, how many can enter the shop at any one time, how many have contracted the virus and so on and so on.

Today's gospel shows we have always been obsessed with numbers and knowing 'how many?'

Here's a number for you..there are 103 days left until Christmas Day! I can hear your groans! Many will dismiss this piece of information. Some will have the calendar out checking my calculations!

Do we equally want to know how many times we should forgive someone? Or do we dismiss the idea of forgiving again or indeed ever? Do we find ourselves checking..."they said they wouldn't, say, do etc again. Yet here we are again!" .....Imagine if Jesus' had said that about us, or personalise that thought..me! Ouch!

In many of life's problems and particularly in scriptural truths we get caught up in asking the wrong questions, or not knowing what the question should be? We look at the wrong things.

Imagine in 103 days or a few days less. Hopefully some cards will come through the letterbox. What will you do? I hope we won't still have to sanitise the post before opening it. Will you spend an age looking at the envelope, the postmark, the way that it's addressed and so on. Agonising over every detail of the envelope but not opening it up to find the message inside?

Many of the images for living that Jesus gave us could be called, 'symbolic envelopes of truth'. In the gospel today we see people looking at the outside scanning for the minutiae of detail and missing the truth inside. As one insurance company would say, 'simples', the message is simples... **Forgive.** Don't obsess with the details forgive.

Have you ever found yourself looking at beautiful photos and asking what was just outside the frame? Taking some photos recently folks in my sight line offered to move and I replied, "it's ok I can angle the camera so you're not in the shot and I can always edit you out!"

Do we do that with people who 'cross us'? An interesting expression when we think of the cross in relation to Jesus and us. We might 'cross him'. What is Jesus' response? The Cross.

I saw a lovely illustration on this from a preacher many years ago. He brought a book so big he could hardly hold it. This he said would probably be like the book presented to him when he reached, 'the pearly gates'. Saint Peter will pull out the book of his life and show him all the bad deeds he had committed through his life. It would be a book bigger than you could imagine, to hold all his regrets.

Gosh don't even start to think how big your own book might be...! But then he started to act out what symbolically St Peter would do. He would turn to page after page going through the book of regrets for past mistakes, one by one. Remarkably every page was white as snow, the pages had been wiped clean and the cover? Of course the colour of blood, red.

The preacher explained Jesus' forgiveness is without limits if we confess our sins. He forgives and forgives and forgives.

How many times should I forgive? The equation plays on the perfect number 7 and really means time without number. But should the question really be put?

Surely our aim should be not to even consider having to think should I forgive? Rather it must be a part of our natural response. To forgive as we are forgiven. A frightening or liberatingly joyful experience.

**Offering prayer.** Think of what you give to God in time and actions for others, in money to church or charity. Put in the balance what might be withheld and why? Let our prayer be that God will have every compartment of our lives and use it for His Glory. Amen.

### **StF 391**

O breath of life, come sweeping through us,  
revive your Church with life and power;  
O breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,  
and fit your Church to meet this hour.

O wind of God, come, bend us, break us,  
till humbly we confess our need;  
then in your tenderness remake us,  
revive, restore; for this we plead.

O breath of love, come, breathe within us,  
renewing thought and will and heart;  
come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,  
revive your Church in every part.

Elizabeth Ann Head (Bessie Porter Head) (1850-1936)

### **Prayers for others and ourselves.**

Think of ripples on a pond and try to imagine  
life and it's needs like that pond reaching out wider and wider from a still centre.

The centre is our faith in a God of love.

We are close to Him in this moment and the circle is tight and small as we know ourselves to be held in His love. Take your worries and needs to Him now and feel His presence.

Look again at the next circle disturbing our calm waters. Those nearest to us, family, friends, our immediate community, our church. Offer to God your concerns.

Look once more at the next circle disturbing our calm waters.

The needs of our nation, the things you have heard about in the news, on the television or radio this week or read about in the newspaper. Offer to God your concerns.

Look even further at the next circle disturbing our calm waters.

The needs of our world, the things you have heard about in the news, on the television or radio this week or read about in the newspaper. Offer to God your concerns.

Now as you would with a stone tossed into a pond, walk away, leaving what you have placed into God's hands. Knowing in His time calm will return... and you need to trust and let go. Amen.

When you feel ready....offer **The Lord's Prayer**

**StF 676**

Christ, from whom all blessings flow,  
perfecting the saints below,  
hear us, who thy nature share,  
who thy mystic body are.

Join us, in one spirit join,  
let us still receive of thine;  
still for more on thee we call,  
thou who fillest all in all.

Closer knit to thee, our Head,  
nourished, Lord, by thee, and fed,  
let us daily growth receive,  
more in Jesus Christ believe,

Never from thy service move,  
needful to each other prove,  
use the grace on each bestowed,  
tempered by the art of God.

Love, like death, has all destroyed,  
rendered all distinctions void;  
names, and sects, and parties fall:  
thou, O Christ, art all in all.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

**The Blessing.**

May the Peace and Love of God  
Fill our hearts and extend to all we encounter this  
week. Amen