



Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity 13th September

Father God, help us to come to you this morning with open and thankful hearts. Fill us with the joy and peace that comes with knowing you. Be with us as we walk in your light, rejoice in your love and reflect your glory.

Amen

Hymn 367: Jesus Where're Thy People Meet

Welcome

The Lord be with you,
and also with you

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Prayer of Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself". There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,**

through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen

Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy

Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in life eternal through Jesus Christ our lord. **Amen**

Gloria

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

Collect for today:

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.

Hymn 67: Be Still for the Presence of the Lord

Gospel Reading: *Matthew 18: 21 - 35*

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

Glory to you, O Lord

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 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 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 Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

Sermon: Rev'd Petra Shakeshaft

Peter asks Jesus, *How often should I forgive? As many as seven times?*

Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times

Or in some translations seventy times seven.

Many of you know that a year ago our house was broken into; that a violent crime was committed and we arrived back in Sawston battered and bruised and uncertain about the future.

There are images seared onto my mind that are both vivid and surreal – two strange men in our hallway as I came through the door and beyond them, Eleanor tied to a chair and gagged. My car keys and phone skittering across the floor as I was thrown to the ground. The feeling of Eleanor's hair ripping in my hands as I tore away the tape used to silence her screams. Bruises emerging on her body and face. Police cars, ambulances and helicopter outside the house. The kindness of neighbours and friends and family who took us in for hours, or days. The labyrinthine corridors under the police station and endless questions, talking, talking, trying to make sense of something utterly senseless. That moment of realisation that we could never live again as a family in that house and what that realisation, would cost.

Then the added trauma of a necessary, but nevertheless brutal system that eventually brought a conviction and justice. The fear the jury might get it wrong. Hearing Eleanor tell both men what they had done to her with such clarity and eloquence, so calm and composed and impressive. The judge silencing one of the men as he shouted at me and at Eleanor as we spoke. *You need to hear every word of this*, he said.

The day after the robbery, Alex, our Archdeacon came to see us. I hope he won't mind me telling you what he said.

First, I can't imagine what you must be feeling.

If it were my daughter, I'd want to tear them limb from limb.

and then, Don't feel you need to be too Christian about this.

Now before you start writing to the Bishop, Alex is a very wise man and I was and am very grateful to him for saying this. The early hours and days, following such a trauma are no time to be doing long-term processing of grief. Anger, fear, shock, are all are a normal and vital part of the processing and must be acknowledged. It's healthy in the short-term, to ensure long term-health and well-being. In truth, I didn't feel physically violent towards them, but my tongue is perhaps a sharper weapon anyway and I had a chance, eventually, to use that in court when it could be used with purpose and effect.

Alex knew as well as I did that there would come a time when I *would* need to be Christian about this though; a time when I would need to process this through and with God's help, because, as a priest, as a Christian, I am called to preach forgiveness. I have spent a lot of time then, thinking about the nature of forgiveness and how to do it. And know that it's not like saying, it's ok, it's nothing. Sometimes forgiveness means saying, *what you did to me sucks*, *It is so not ok.*

But - I will not be defined by what you did.

I will not be broken by it, and it is right that justice should be done.

In our Gospel the servant is released from an astronomical debt, the equivalent of perhaps billions; more than a servant could possibly have earned in a lifetime. This heap of money is a metaphor for the heap of sin we build up, not breaking into Rectories or assault or murder, but the seemingly small, daily things; the unkind thought or word or deed, the barbed comment intended to bring someone down, the times we don't bother to call someone, or ignore a plea for help – the list, of course is endless, but so is God's forgiveness.

And so the debt never accrues, because God's forgiveness constantly wipes the slate clean. I know there are awful things I've said and done throughout my life, while other people might hold them against me, God doesn't. I am forgiven. You are forgiven.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

The mistake the unforgiving servant makes is to accept forgiveness, but not to extend it to his fellow servant whose own debt was far smaller. And for this he will suffer torture.

Unforgiveness is torture. When we can't or don't forgive another it weighs us down, shackles us, it chains us to that person, to that hurt they inflicted on us and stops us moving on. We need to forgive as much as we need forgiveness ourselves. But it is a process.

How do we go on forgiving someone who has really hurt us and, perhaps, who goes on hurting us? How do I forgive those two men who changed the direction of our lives? I know I can't do this alone – not in my own strength.

Jesus shows Peter that forgiveness is a journey. We can't always do it in one go – we need to revisit it time and time again, not just seven times, or even seventy times seven, because sometimes, we think we've nailed it and then, something happens and, bang! all that pain wells up again and you realise you're not quite there.

These are the things we have to give up to God and let *his* forgiveness work through us, because, on our own, we are limited and our forgiveness is limited, bound by our own lack of imagination and bruised ego. Gods' forgiveness though, is unlimited; boundless, gratuitous, reckless and offered to us over and over again in love and grace;

Being Christian about something means extending to another the boundless forgiveness God extends to us; it means believing the welfare of that person is as important as my own welfare; seeing those two men as a human beings, perhaps broken and hurt by a life I can't imagine.

The long sentences given to them reflects not only the severity of the crime committed on us, but their long history of offences. One of the defence barristers said of his client, he had shown no remorse and when he is released will do it again. I pray that this is not true, but fear it may be. I pray that they both may understand what they do to people causes pain, that they may feel remorse, and so come to know what forgiveness feels like, because forgiveness sets us free, whether we are the debtor or the indebted – and we are both.

I am forgiven. I forgive. I am free.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin

Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers

Father, we thank you for bringing us safely to this new day. We give you thanks for the wonder and beauty of your creation which we see all around us every day. May we take time to enjoy it despite other calls on our time. We have not been good stewards of the creation you gave into our care. We pray that we can now slow the progress of global warming so that future generations can enjoy it.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, in this time of uncertainty and as we enter interregnum, we pray for our churches of St Mary's and St Peter's. We pray that your Holy Spirit may guide us as we plan new ways of worshipping given the restrictions caused by the pandemic. We give thanks that we can reach members of our church family unable for whatever reason to attend services in person by using Zoom and for others by service sheets. We thank you for all Petra is doing for us and for all who contribute to our services in many and varied ways. We pray for all the children in our church family who are missing Open Door Kids and for the plans for their inclusion in activities where they can meet with each other.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Merciful God, we pray for our world, broken as it is with war, natural disasters and now with Covid 19. We pray for all countries, but especially those where the rate of Covid 19 infection has increased and those ill equipped to deal with the virus. We give thanks for all the medical staff who throughout the pandemic have worked to prevent the spread of the disease and to care for the sick and dying. Father keep them safe and give them strength and courage to continue to battle against the virus. We pray for all who have lost loved ones and are grieving their loss. May they know your presence with them and gain comfort in their grief.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for the Queen and her family. Father please keep them safe and well. We pray for our Government: Gracious Lord, we pray that all in positions of power and authority may be granted patience, knowledge and wisdom with regard to the ever changing decisions they need to make for our safety and our future. We pray for all who are seeking to find a vaccine to combat the virus. Father we pray for patience, courage and strength and for their safety in their work.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for our communities of Sawston and Babraham and the families within them. We pray for the children who have returned to school, some for the first time since March. We pray they may soon get used to the new structure in their school day and will find joy in being with their friends again. Father, please keep them and their teachers safe and well.

We give thanks for the businesses, shops, Health Centre and chemist who have been so supportive throughout and ask your blessing upon them.

We pray for Alan and Liz as they prepare for their move to Little Downham and a new era in their lives. May they have a long and happy retirement and enjoy watching and helping Harriet as she grows up.

Caring God, we pray for those who we know who are ill at this time and those in our church family. We pray for Mary's continued recovery and give thanks for the surgeon's skill who carried out the operation so successfully.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Compassionate God, we continue to pray for Agnes, her family, friends and those at Orchard House who knew Tom. Father, may they and we know your love and your peace. We pray for all who mourn.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Peace:

Take a moment and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for each other and our church family church community. Maybe call or text someone who would enjoy sharing the peace with you.

May the God of peace make you perfect and holy, that you may be kept safe and blameless in spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Hymn 310: I Heard the Voice

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours.
Now and for ever.
Amen.**

Hymn 517: O Love That Will Not Let

Remembering the Lord's Supper:

Take a moment to remember the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. As we think about this meal - with the washing of feet and bread and wine shared with friends - we remember Jesus' offering of himself on the cross. We rejoice in his resurrection from the dead and look forward to the coming of God's Kingdom. While we cannot receive Christ in the sacraments in the usual way, we can be the presence of Christ in our homes and communities and we can be a praying presence wherever we are.

Hymn 580: Rejoice the Lord is King

Closing Prayer:

Lord God, we thank you for this time of worship; may your love and peace remain with us in the coming days. Be with us in all that we will think, say and do so that our lives may reflect your glory. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen

If you have any prayer or pastoral needs, please don't hesitate to contact
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