



# Open Door: Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020, 10.30 am

## Forgive Us

### Welcome and Notices

### Prayer

*At home, at work, at school, in the garden, in the street, in church, on zoom:*

*God is with us.*

***God is with us***

### Song: All My Days (Beautiful Saviour)

### Reading: Ephesians 4: 29-5:2

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children, and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

### Introduction

*Today we continue our theme for the Autumn, the Lord's Prayer. Today is "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". Let's spend a few moments preparing ourselves for this, gathering our thoughts, asking God as Spirit to inspire us.*

...

*Let's hear again the version from Matthew's gospel. We'll also hear the verse which follows the prayer in Matthew, where Jesus re-emphasises today's theme..*

### Reading: Matthew 6:9-15

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, your Father will not forgive you."

## Talk: Sara Merritt

Ephesians 4: 32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Matthew 6

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...For if you forgive men when they trespass, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

*We started by finding something moderately heavy to hold in one hand while listening...*

I also invited everyone to visualise or draw an idealised picture of themselves as the best they could possibly be.

When you come to this point of the Lord's Prayer how do you respond?

I tend to rack my brain, super-quickly, for what I've done wrong recently. Do you do that? And then, if we have a confession prayer as well, I do it again!

Do you think that's what Jesus wanted us to do when he gave us this prayer?

.....

*(pause to consider)*

Another alternative, when we come to this part of the Prayer, is to spend time making sure that we have forgiven 'those who sin against us'..

I wonder, especially bearing in mind the explaining sentence that comes after the prayer, if that's what the focus of this line should be, really, – so instead of racking our brains for our own sins, we examine ourselves for anything we're holding against other people, so it's kind of "Please forgive our sins in the same way as we "now" forgive others..." That's quite difficult to do in the seconds it takes to say the line, and that reminds us that the Lord's Prayer should probably be used as a framework for our prayer during the week, not just on Sundays – so we could spend time on one line a day during the week, perhaps – so that we can think about each subject in a bit more depth..

### What is sin?

This morning we're going to try to unpack the ideas of sin and forgiveness. I've got four ideas of sin to think about.

#### 1 Separation

One idea of sin is 'that which separates us from God'

Romans 8 says that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Can we be separated from God while still being loved?

Does He have to keep us at a distance because of our unholiness?

I don't think God has designed a universe like that.

What he has done is given us free will. So maybe it's not God's will that we are separated, but ours. And that's where the sin lies. He doesn't want to be separated, but we do it ourselves when we turn from Him, when we turn from the close relationship he offers, when we stubbornly go our own way, like the Israelites throughout the Old Testament. It's not God's will that makes sin separate us from God, but our own stubborn free will. So maybe one definition of sin is deliberately separating ourselves from God.

So as we turn to God in prayer, that in itself is repentance and we are instantly enfolded in forgiving love, also known as grace. The forgiveness, grace, love, is there waiting for us as soon as we turn back to God.

#### 2 Being less than myself

The normal Bible word for sin is 'hamartia' which means 'falling short of the mark'. When we don't act as children of God, when we don't fulfil our potential as beautiful human beings.

This is where that picture of the person we want to be and that God wants us to be comes in. As Ephesians says, “our new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

...

Probably a bit shiny. Fulfilling all our amazing God-given potential.

I know I fall short of that picture. I am not at all as shiny as I'm meant to be. I guess that's sin.

The brilliant thing is, of course, that thanks to Jesus, God sees us as his children anyway. As you know, a parent has great desires and hopes for their children and knows what they could do, but when it comes down to it that loving parent still loves their child whatever they do. I think that's a reflection of God, who just can't stop loving us. When we ask for help, the Holy Spirit, the encourager, guides and enables us to fulfil our potential, to be more truly our shiny, whole selves.

### 3. Stumbling

The Greek word in the sentence after the prayer, sometimes translated transgression, is *paraptoma*, which means fall beside or stumble (*ptoma* is fall, *para* is beside.) This gives me a sense of falling off the right path. Stumbling into the ditch beside the road, perhaps. Which can be a small thing or a deadly one, depending on the depth of the ditch... But it's not the same as *hamartia*, which I think has more a sense of being 'imperfect' – do you see the difference? *Hamartia* means falling short of God or of our potential, but *paraptoma* means falling off the path, stumbling. (Maybe I'm reading too much into the difference, but it makes sense to me!) Remember, this word is used in the context of us forgiving other people

Maybe forgiveness for us isn't so much about whether someone is perfectly godly or not, but about our response when someone stumbles, makes a mistake in their life path, walks where they shouldn't, trespasses on our property, maybe treads on our toes. Do those things ring any bells? We're asked, indeed, required, to forgive them for those things.

God forgives us our falling short, as we forgive our brother and sister's stumblings.

### 4. Debt

My fourth picture of sin comes from the Lord's Prayer itself. In Matthew Jesus uses a completely different word for what needs to be forgiven - the word *opheilema*, debt.

Maybe debt in this sense means “things we ought to do that we haven't done”. Responsibilities or duties.

I think we carry around all kinds of stuff which we might describe as a debt to God. It's a burden.

But the great thing is that the word for forgiveness (*aphesis*) is all about release, giving up, dismissing, sending away that debt. This idea, of debts being freely discharged, is the sin and forgiveness picture which lifts my heart! I can now put down the burden I've been carrying! What a relief! (*If you're still holding the object you picked up, put it down and feel the relief!*)

This debt and release of debt reminds me of the glorious concept of Jubilee.

## Forgiveness

### Jubilee

Jubilee is described in Leviticus 25, and it's a radical idea. Just as the Israelites were instructed to rest on the Sabbath, every 7 days, they were also supposed to rest the land for one year every 7 years – they could eat what the land produced naturally, but not work it in the same way as usual. So the land has a sabbath rest too. And according to Leviticus, every 7 sabbath years –  $7 \times 7 = 49$ , so on the 50<sup>th</sup> year – there should be a whole year of this kind of rest in which – apparently – they shouldn't even eat what the land produced naturally (rely on their stores I guess) and also, crucially, all debts would be dismissed. Nothing really belonged to anyone permanently, because it all belonged ultimately to God. Property in this system was a whole different thing. So there's a whole lot of discussion in Leviticus about how this means that if you're buying and selling things (including people, slaves) you have to calculate the price bearing in mind that at Jubilee – after 50 years – they can be redeemed and freely returned to the original owner or to themselves - freed. Can you imagine what a difference this concept would have made to society?

And any debt would never last more than 50 years, when it must be freely discharged. Forgiven.. Slaves would be set free. Chains would be broken.

Now, nobody is quite sure whether ancient Israel ever actually implemented this system. If they had, it would have made them even more distinct from the cultures around them, which seems to be what God intended for them. But the story of the Old Testament is one of assimilation and becoming more and more like their neighbours, with occasional repentance and return to God. So they probably didn't do it properly.

Nevertheless, the idea of Jubilee remains a revolutionary one, and one which can make a huge difference to our idea of forgiveness.

Imagine. Imagine being having a debilitating illness and then suddenly being healed. Imagine your mortgage being paid off. Imagine Frodo carrying the Ring, getting heavier and heavier. Imagine whatever burden you have, being suddenly taken away. That is Jubilee. That is what God offers. That is forgiveness.

Jesus says "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

### **In summary**

So, this has been a bit of a ramble, but to sum up:

Sin is turning from God. Forgiveness is waiting for us when we turn back.

Sin is separating, forgiveness is welcoming back

Sin is falling short, forgiveness is accepting anyway

Sin is stepping off the path, forgiveness is walking beside, pulling out of the ditch

Sin is being in debt, forgiveness is being generously liberated.

As we have been forgiven, so let us forgive.

As we forgive, so shall we be forgiven.

Let's finish with a line from Richard Rohr:

*"I think the real purpose of the spiritual journey is to expand people's ability to do good by liberating them. This is what Jesus did, after all—free people from their pain, their sin, their "uncleanness," and even their deaths. Then he sent them back to their families and to society to live in relationship and live lives of freedom and wholeness."*

**Breakout rooms** to discuss and consider

### **Song: Forgiveness**

### **Regathering**

The Lord's Prayer and time of silence to confess and forgive others

### **Prayers: Sally Bard**

Let us pray

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

Almighty God, through the life of your son Jesus Christ and his death on the cross, you have shown us that *forgiveness* is at the very heart of your great love for each one of us; by your Holy Spirit teach us to grow in love for one another, because it is in loving and *forgiving* one another that you want us to show you our love for you.

Gracious God

Hear our prayer

Lord through this *forgiving* love you have promised that we will be known as your disciples; help us to practice *forgiveness* when we are wronged by others in small ways, where so often we fail, so that we may be ready to meet, with *forgiveness*, the big, difficult things that happen to us.

Gracious God

Hear our prayer

Show us how to stand against the injustices of the world without losing hope of the transformation the gospel of Jesus offers. Strengthen the faith of church leaders as they seek to care for their churches and as they continue to offer help and hope to their communities.

Gracious God

Hear our prayer

Give wisdom to the leaders of the nations in these difficult times for we realise every decision they make affects us all. Thank you for the selflessness of so many dealing with the present pandemic. Show us how to play our part. Guard and guide us as we watch or listen to the news day by day. May our security and hope be found in your great, *forgiving* love.

Gracious God

Hear our prayer

We remember before you so many people in need of your healing presence, those who are ill, those who are dying and all who grieve. In our own church family we continue to pray for those we know to be in particular need.....

Gracious God

Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

**Song: Your Grace Finds Me**

**Blessing**

**Breakout Rooms**