

Transcript of Service At Home September 13th 2020
Led by Rev. Jayne Webb

Welcome

Opening prayers
God of grace,
You have made our minds,
So help us to know you.
You have made our hearts
So help us to love you.
You have made our voices,
So help us to sing your praise.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit,
So together we may celebrate your glory
And worship you in spirit and in truth,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Confession

You have given us a world of beauty,
and we have spoilt it.
A world to feed us,
and so many go hungry.
A world of riches,
and we are unwilling to share.
A world to care for,
and we think only of ourselves.
Forgive us, gracious God,
for those times your heart is saddened
by our selfishness.
For those times we have no thought
for others, no cares but ours.
Enable us to see this world anew
as a gift from you,
to be shared and nurtured,
and those who live upon it
to be loved and cared for.
We ask this that your name
may be glorified,
through the beauty of this world,
and the service of our lives
Amen

(opening prayers from faith and worship)

Hymn 99 Stf All creatures of our God and King

Reading Matthew 18: 21-35

Message

There are two things that immediately struck me about our gospel reading for today. this reading

The first is that Jesus is again using parables to get his message across. He does this when he wants the teaching to go deep. Parables penetrate the soul, they have a way of bypassing the human mind which is dualistic and most often resistant to making change. Whereas the soul is more unitive, more wise and engages in change at the level of being rather than merely at the level of doing something different which is most often when that resistance kicks in..

The second thing that strikes me is that he is back on the subject of forgiveness which is one of the major themes of his spiritual ministry.

It is so important to Jesus that he covers it many times in his preaching and yet it seems such a tricky subject for us to one for us to come to terms with.

Often I wonder whether this is because Jesus' teaching on forgiveness has so often been misrepresented that we have come to see it as a moral duty on our part to forgive in order that the other person might be in some way absolved.

But in chapter 6 of Matthew's gospel, immediately after Jesus teaches the Lord's prayer, we hear this in v 14

'For if you forgive others their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you but if you do not forgive others neither will your father forgive your trespasses.'

No this is not pointing to a moral imperative towards the other, for their sake, after all it may be that they have long since left this earthly life. Jesus is concerned here about our own healing and integration. He is explaining here that one of the biggest blocks to this is holding onto grudges, pocketing away chunks of resentment because in so doing we are choosing to preclude the flow of God's spirit in and through us, which is so essential to our transformation; our blossoming into our true self.

One of my favourite theologians John O'Donahue makes this point very succinctly in a story.

It is about a friend of his who had been imprisoned in East Germany many many years ago under the extremely repressive Honecker regime which he'd been active in protesting against.

On being imprisoned he quickly realised that he had to learn not to resent the prison officers despite some of the harsh treatment that they meted out to the inmates. He wisely realised that resentment and embitterment would ultimately only lead to his own inward self destruction. So, he chose, as far as possible, to make friends with the prison officers and to

treat them well and respectfully whatever their demeanour towards him might be. Well time went by and he and many others were eventually released from prison and many years after this he met up with a fellow prisoner he had served time with.

Inevitably they got around to talking about their time together in detention. Now the other person said how much he would like to meet up with those prison officers and pay them back for all of the harsh treatment they had put him through, he was full of hatred and resentment towards them and told John's friend in no uncertain term of what he wouldn't do if he ever got the chance to get his revenge.

Hearing all of this the friend then turned to this man and said "Do you know what the really sad thing about what you are saying is?" The man said "What?" and the friend replied "After all these years you are still in prison!"

And that sums up in a very simple way the reason why forgiveness is so important and why Jesus is effectively saying if you choose not to forgive others then God cannot release you from the grip of inner resentment. A bit like the story above, we are unconsciously choosing an inner imprisonment.

Forgiveness then is not a moral duty to God or even the other person but rather the path of release so that your spiritual reconciliation to God may become complete.

Now of course it may be that the pain caused by the other has been so catastrophic for the soul or has become so ingrained for so many years that it has almost become part of who we are. Sometimes that may mean we need professional help to release some of the inner pain and this can be hugely beneficial.

Then again, Sometimes a simple understanding of what forgiveness is, and perhaps more importantly what it is not, can assist that release.

So let's just explore a few points on what forgiveness is not:

Firstly forgiveness is not a sudden response. Sometimes we see people respond to intentional harm or injustice by forgiving very quickly and that may well be the right thing to do for them but it certainly isn't always that easy and some things may take a huge amount of processing before we can come to a place of forgiveness, and that is fine.

Secondly forgiveness does not result in trust. Sometimes when trust has been broken it may, depending on circumstances, never be re-established but that does not mean that forgiveness cannot happen.

Thirdly forgiveness does not result in restoring a relationship. Sometimes it is right to remove ourselves from a relationship that is harmful or abusive and we may choose never to have anything further to do with the other, perhaps for our own safety or other reasons, but that doesn't mean that we can't forgive.

Fourthly forgiveness is very different from forgetting. Indeed to forgive and at the same time remember in an integrated way of processing and can bring much wisdom and transform our wounds into the gift of healing.

Fifthly forgiveness is not about minimising, lessening or condoning what the other has done. This will only lead to pushing the pain into our unconscious where it stays as an open wound.

And finally forgiveness is not a feeling it is an act of will. So we may forgive in our head but not feel anything different in our heart to begin with. It might be that we must go on forgiving each time the incident rears its head in our thoughts and we realise there is still some resentment in us... we all go through that and so we keep forgiving until the matter is resolved in our hearts. This may be at the heart of Peters question when he asks Jesus, in V2 of our reading

21, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as 7 times"

And Jesus replies "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

You see how this points to an act of the will and not necessarily of the heart which may well continue to feel hurt and angry until we have processed our pain.

And so we go on forgiving knowing that whilst this is indeed a narrow path and can feel like a very costly one at times (and it is) it is a hugely significant part of our that journey home to oneness with God where, according to the great mystic Julian of Norwich we will find that all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well!

Hymn 494 StF Come thou fount of every blessing

Prayers

Thanksgiving

All this sights that have blessed you this last week (pause to reflect)

All the sounds that have brought you joy (pause...)

All the good food and drink that you have tasted (pause...)

All the smells that have brought you comfort (pause...)

All the textures that have come to life in nature in the warmth of spring (pause...)

All the relationships that support you (pause...)

All of the conversations that have blessed you (pause...)

Dear God we Give you our heartfelt thanks....Amen

And so we turn our prayers to our concerns for others

From the images or stories of news from around our world we bring to mind one that weighs heavily on us. Aware that there is nowhere in this world where God is not fully present we trust in divine wisdom, compassion and reconciling ministry in Christ that the world should be made whole.

Silence

From our own circle of people known to us who need our prayer at this time, we bring them before God....aware that God's ways are so much bigger than our ways, beyond our understanding, but always moving in the direction of healing and wholeness both in and beyond our time here on earth.

Silence

From our own heart we bring our longings, our hopes and our needs....

Silence

We bring all of our prayers to our faithful, loving God who taught us when we pray to say

Lords Prayer

Our father who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom
The power and the glory
Forever and ever
Amen

Blessing

May the peace of God reign in this place
and the love of God forever hold you tight,
May the Spirit of God flow through your life
and the joy of God uphold you day and night.

Amen

