

**Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit  
Service at Home, 17th September, 2023**

prepared by the Revd Eric Renouf

**Hello!**

What a relief it is to be accepted as we are, warts and all! The Christian good news is that this is the way that God treats us – each one of us. Our first hymn focusses on this amazing fact.

**Hymn (StF 416)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jUSle4WVmg>

There's wideness in God's mercy  
like the wideness of the sea;  
there's a kindness in his justice  
which is more than liberty.

There is plentiful redemption  
in the blood that has been shed;  
there is joy for all the members  
in the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for thousands  
of new worlds as great as this;  
there is room for new creations  
in that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader  
than the measures of the mind;  
and the heart of the Eternal  
is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow  
by false limits of our own;  
and we magnify his strictness  
with a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple  
we should take him at his word;  
and our lives would be illumined  
by the presence of our Lord.

(Frederick W Faber 1814-1853)

**Prayer**

Dear God, thank you that your love is far broader than our minds can imagine, in keeping with all that you are and do. Forgive us when we place our human limits on the magnitude of your being and of your love.

Help us to accept your mercy for ourselves and and, please, let the dynamic of that growing relationship with you shape our living day by day.

**Amen**

**Collect for the Day**

God our Redeemer, who called your Church to witness that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself: help us so to proclaim the good news of your love that all who hear it may be reconciled to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**Gospel: Matthew 18: 21-35**

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"*

*Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven".*

*"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.*

*The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.*

*But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me,' he demanded.*

*His fellow-servant fell on his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.*

*Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow-servant just as I had on you? In anger his master turned him over to the jailors to be tortured, until he should pay back all that he owed.*

*'This how my heavenly Father will treat each of you, unless you forgive your brother from your heart.'*

#### **Sermon:**

Forgiving someone who has wronged me can be a tough challenge. How many times should I forgive that person? That's the question posed by Peter. It's a challenge that can hit any of us.

The reply that Jesus gave Peter says that he should be ready to forgive the person as many times as he or she has wronged him, even *'seventy times seven'*. In effect, Jesus is saying that forgiveness should become habitual.

In the story that Jesus told, there's a huge contrast in the sum the servant owed the master and what was owed by the fellow-servant. One scholar suggests it's on the scale of 600,000 to 1 – that's quite a contrast!

The hugely generous master forgives on a vast scale - but then later changes his mind and re-imposes the sentence after he learned what the one servant had done to the other.

Matthew tells us that Jesus added, *'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you, unless*

*you forgive your brother from your heart.'* It seems to me that Jesus is saying that it is those who forgive any who hurt them who then are able to receive God's forgiveness.

The pattern prayer which Jesus gave his disciples includes the petition, *'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us'*. Saying that prayer can be fair warning to us that we should not treat lightly the forgiveness that God offers us.

Even so, forgiving someone who has wronged me can be a huge personal challenge. Archbishop Desmond Tutu had personal experience of such hurt, like so many other people, during the apartheid years in South Africa.

In the new era that dawned with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, it was essential that a way forward should be found to help people of diverse ethnicities to live and work together. So, President Mandela asked Desmond Tutu and others to set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to help South Africans of every race move forward together.

The process helped the person who had suffered and the perpetrator to meet - and so enable each other know more of the truth behind that horrific event in their own lives. Knowing the truth and then being prepared to forgive were essential early steps before there could be reconciliation.

After working with others on this truth and reconciliation pathway in South Africa, Desmond Tutu, along with his daughter Mpho, wrote *'The Book of Forgiving'*. In it they spell out a fourfold path of forgiveness to help any who are struggling with the hurt they have suffered or with the hurt they inflicted on another person.

Basically, that four-fold path involves facing the truth and admitting it; telling one's own painful

story and witnessing the anguish; asking for forgiveness and giving forgiveness; and renewing the broken relationship or ending it.

Recently I found this statement in another book, and it affirms the pattern of that four-fold path of forgiveness. *'The Christian art of forgiveness is not the ability to somehow forget or ignore the fact that someone has offended or hurt us. It is instead the ability, while fully or even painfully aware of that hurt, to say 'It shall not come between us.'* (from *The new Lion Handbook Christian Belief*, p 189)

That counter-cultural view is seen in the teaching, and the life and death of Jesus. As he was dying on the cross, he said, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* (Luke 23:34) He was living out what he had said to his disciples. *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ...'"* (Matthew 5: 43,44)

Such an attitude can open the way to a new and developing relationship with the other person, and echoes the pattern of how God in Christ welcomes us. The Christian good news is that God in his sheer generosity forgives us as we turn to him, sorry for what we have done, and committed to follow the way of Jesus in our lives.

Think of Zacchaeus and what happened when he met with Jesus who had invited himself to his house, despite the muttering of bystanders. It was when Zacchaeus showed he really wanted to change that Jesus said, *'Today salvation has come to this house ... for the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost'* (see Luke 19)

The wonder and the powerful effect of receiving God's forgiveness comes through in our second hymn, written by Brian Wren. It was first published in *New Church Praise* in 1975, with the heading *'And can it be...'*, a quotation from Charles Wesley's famous hymn. Brian once

described his own hymn as a restatement in contemporary terms of Wesley's (see StF 345). It's worth reading and re-reading each of them!

### Hymn (StF 499)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5DCp7dqpuQ>

Great God, your love has called us here  
as we, by love for love were made.  
Your living likeness still we bear,  
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed;  
we come, with all our heart and mind,  
your call to hear, your love to find.

We come, with self-inflicted pains  
of broken trust and chosen wrong,  
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,  
by social forces swept along,  
by powers and systems close confined,  
yet seeking hope for humankind.

Great God, in Christ you call our name,  
and then receive us as your own,  
not through some merit, right or claim,  
but by your gracious love alone;  
we strain to glimpse your mercy-seat  
and find you kneeling at our feet.

Then take the towel, and break the bread,  
and humble us, and call us friends;  
suffer and serve till all are fed,  
and show how grandly love intends  
to work till all creation sings,  
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

Great God, in Christ you set us free  
your life to live, your joy to share;  
give us your Spirit's liberty  
to turn from guilt and dull despair  
and offer all that faith can do  
while love is making all things new.

(Brian Wren, b 1936)

## Prayer of Dedication

Thank you, dear God, for your amazing love shown in so many ways. In response to your sheer grace, we offer to you who we are and have, to trust and love you and to work with you, where we are, in your life-giving and renewing work in the Church and in the world. **Amen.**

### *Prayers (leaving space for our own thoughts and prayers)*

Dear God, we thank you for the sheer privilege of being invited by you through Jesus into your company. Help us, and all who are friends of Jesus, to follow your way in our daily life so that others also will respond to your love - and that we all may serve the purposes of your kingdom.

God of compassion, we remember before you people who have been deeply hurt, who struggle with the heavy burden of bitter memories and unresolved injury ... .. Give them courage and grace and the help of others who understand their need, so that they may find release into a better future.

God of justice, we remember before you also those who create deep hurt on others ... ..  
...and pray that they may turn from those destructive ways into your ways of justice and peace.

Eternal God, we thank you for those who have gone before us, especially those who are dear to us ... .. and we ask that those who are bereaved, or struggling for any other reason, will especially sense the comfort of your love.

### **The 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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. **Amen**

## Hymn: StF 423

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixSFDnOuGO0>

'Forgive our sins as we forgive,'  
you taught us, Lord, to pray,  
but you alone can grant us grace  
to live the words we say.

How can your pardon reach and bless  
the unforgiving heart  
that broods on wrongs, and will not let  
old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals  
the truth we dimly knew,  
how small the debts are owed to us,  
how great our debt to you!

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls,  
and let resentment cease;  
then, reconciled by God to all,  
our lives will spread your peace.

(Rosamund Eleanor Herklots 1905-1987)

## Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

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**Please note:** If anything in this service troubles you personally, it may help you to share that burden with someone who is willing to listen, even if you also have prayed about it.