



Welcome to
All Saints
Kings Heath
Your Parish Church
in the Diocese of Birmingham

Forgiveness is hard

Holy Communion

Sunday 13th September 2020

We gather

At home, have ready in an honoured place a portion of food and something to drink. It may be bread and wine or something else. You might light a candle.

We imagine everyone in their homes around the parish, united in preparing for prayer.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. **Amen.**

HYMN At home you can sing as loudly as you like, as if no one but God is listening. In church we remain seated to listen, or hum, to the hymn:

HYMN [Praise, my soul, the King of heaven](#)

1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven!
To his feet thy tribute bring;
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who like me his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!

2. Praise him for his grace and favour
to our fathers in distress;
praise him still the same as ever,
slow to chide and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness!
3. Father-like, he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hands he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows!
4. Angels, help us to adore him;
ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!

(Henry Frances Lyte, based on Psalm 103)

We pray:

**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 the Holy Spirit, that we may
perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

We seek forgiveness

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in
steadfast love. Let us, then, draw near and confess our sins. (Ps 103:8)

Silence

[Your love for us is abundant and everlasting,](#)

yet we turn away in fear and shame, expecting only punishment.

Your love removes our sins as far as the east is from the west
yet we insist on keeping them close.

Kyrie Eleison

(Lord, have mercy)

Your love releases us from every debt
yet we resist your freedom, preferring imprisonment.

Your love forgives us seventy times seven, time without number,
yet we keep the score of others' wrongs.

Christe Eleison

(Christ, have mercy)

Your love for us is new every morning
yet we cling on to old hurts and grievances.

Your love longs to embrace us as your kith and kin
yet we are suspicious and wary and hold you at arms' length.

Kyrie Eleison

(Lord, have mercy)

ABSOLUTION

David: The God of love and power forgive you
and free you from your sins,
heal and strengthen you by his Spirit
and raise you to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE 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 sins 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.**

We pray THE COLLECT for the 14th Sunday after Trinity

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](#)

NEW TESTAMENT READING [Romans 14:1-12](#)

HYMN [Make me a channel of your peace](#)

1. Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love.
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord,
and where there's doubt, true faith in you.
*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood, as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*
2. Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy.
O Master, grant that I may never seek ...
3. Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

(Sebastian Temple,

GOSPEL READING [Matthew 18:21-35](#)

SERMON

You remember the story. The half-brothers loathed Joseph's arrogance and resented him being Dad's favourite. Persuaded by Reuben not to kill him, they sold him into slavery. Coming to Egypt for help during a famine, who should be in charge of the whole country but Joseph. He

forgave them, but now their father was gone, they realised they didn't really trust that forgiveness. Their shame and guilt lingered horribly. They hadn't forgiven themselves. Their sense of powerlessness continued. Joseph was hurt that they still didn't quite trust his forgiveness and comforted them by reminding them of the divine perspective: even as a powerful civil servant, he was just a man like them. We are all under God's judgement and God is the merciful one who dreams of reconciliation and makes good things come out of the terrible mess we make.

I wonder if you have ever found it hard to forgive yourself. I wonder if you have ever felt inhibited by shame. Forgiveness is hard to accept.

It was understandable that, as restrictions were lifted, a lot of people headed for the beach. How dreadful, though, that scattering 33 tons of rubbish there, some abused refuse collectors who came to clear up. After all the vigorous Thursday night applause for key workers, it was a hideous contradiction. We're embarrassed enough normally about people clearing away our rubbish and rarely look them in the eye. That embarrassment, though, seems heightened as we emerge from the powerlessness of lockdown and our frustration bursts out dreadfully in projected contempt. Perhaps feeling infantilised by the restriction on hugs and visits, and by alliterative government slogans, and spending energy holding our coiled fears inside, the release was always bound to be risky.

This is what Jesus captures brilliantly with a cartoonist's skill, a few strokes evoking such complexity. Imagine the coil of tension in a man so indebted, perhaps keeping it secret from his family. Imagine the shame that grew with the debt over the years, the childishness of pleading, then the peculiar powerlessness of being forgiven. Imagine the release of pent up worry bursting out in violent abuse of someone owing him so little. He is really beating himself. Understandable and inexcusable, we

witness a man in painful transition. Yes: forgiveness is hard. It is akin to the transition we as a nation are in now; one we can make well or badly.

It's striking how his dysfunction distresses the other servants.

Forgiveness seems very personal, but it is a community matter. It's not to say all the details of any sin and forgiveness that occur need to be public, but Jesus deftly highlights how our inner turmoil or peace will inevitably affect others. Forgiveness can send ripples of grace to bless all around but, in his inability to accept grace gracefully, this man sends ripples of distress through the community. Our behaviour in public will be affected by our spiritual health.

Jesus perceived that Peter needed to hear this parable because he was in a dangerous spiritual place. Peter was being tolerant. He was counting how often he should "forgive" because he wanted to be able to be aggressive on the eighth occasion with an easy conscience. Tolerance is delayed conflict. Tolerance is passive aggressive. It assumes moral high ground. This church labels itself inclusive. I hope it is, but that, too, risks being tolerant, superior, patronising. It can be hard being forgiven by someone tolerant, because you can't trust it's really forgiveness. When we encounter passive aggression in each other, it stirs a deeper fear we have that God may be passive aggressive. Indeed, being God, surely he may be the most passive aggressive of all. He has the nuclear button of judgment after all. Tolerance looks like forgiveness at first, but in reality it corrupts our understanding of the universe, stirring our suspicion that God isn't really for us.

Jesus came to prove this is not so. He entered into our shame and shaming on the cross to prove God's healing empathy. He came to prove he wants to be with us, and his non-manipulative forgiveness makes that possible.

Paul describes a Jesus-fellowship that is emphatically not tolerant. Rather, the different ethical emphases and ecclesiastical tastes and character types that come into the community are honoured un-

competitively. Each is assumed to be a gift that will deepen your faith, rather than someone to be tolerated until brought around to your way of thinking. "Who are [we] to pass judgement on the servants of another?" he asks, because we all know we are God's servants and each have different things God forgives. It's not a competition. It's an ecology of grace.

Paul is obliquely addressing one of the ways in which we accidentally judge each other and let each other down. It may be unintentional, but our sharp look, or indeed our neglect, can hurt and discourage. Our sins of omission are among our worst. There can be a forgiveness we don't even know we need until it surprises us.

Nicola shares a powerful example of this from Srebreniza.

The mothers of Srebrenica

In the kiosk selling souvenirs, opposite the cemetery, I meet one of the mothers. She speaks no English and I, of course, have no Bosnian. Her face – the face of grandmothers of every race, generation and religion – gazes into my sixty-year-old face, her eyes into my sad eyes. She beholds me with an infinite gentleness containing not one jot of blame or recrimination. We hold each others' hands, hug each other lightly. She speaks to me of the prices of postcards and sewn items, and it is the most exquisite poetry pouring over my head and bathing me in forgiveness. I need no translator to tell me her story, or she mine. Each to each, in a place far out beyond language, we become mothers to the motherless, in the kiosk opposite the parking bay at the U.N. safe haven where eight and a half thousand finally rest in peace.

21.iii.18

Once again, this intimate one to one encounter of forgiveness accepted humbly is an example of what a community matter forgiveness is. Heaven forbid we should have such terror to assimilate again. But in less spectacular ways, it takes a certain attentiveness to notice and hear and accept that forgiveness well. Paul describes a community where the assumption of the other as gift creates the conditions in which accidental judgmentalism is less likely and in which forgiveness is free to flow.

The subtle scriptures have shone a light on some of the difficulties we may have with being forgiven. They show how, oddly, it takes a certain grace on our part to accept forgiveness well.

But Jesus' hilarious overwhelming of Peter's studied tolerance gives us great hope. "Not seven times, but seventy seven times," he cries. He evokes the lavish Hebrew Jubilee forgiveness of debt, release from slavery and rest for the generous earth in that sevenfold multiplication. Pastorally and politically radical, he shows every soul in need and in receipt of the gift of forgiveness. If we feel it's hard to trust, and hard to accept, and we feel tired by our mundane repetition of sin and confession, God seems to accept that we need a repetitive rhythm in our life of confession and absolution. His "seventy times seven" shows we need not despair, nor wallow in dangerous shame. In our different traditions we may express it in various ways, from emotive choruses to formal ritual, but the repetitive rhythm is a gift, as deep and essential as the weeks and their Sabbath. The habit of confession and absolution can be done well or badly, of course. We could say cheaply "I can do what I like. I know I'll be forgiven." Or we could say gloomily "It's so depressing. Round and round, I keep making the same mistakes. Absolution makes no difference." Carelessness and despair are equally indulgent. Jesus' "Seventy seven" allows for our need of a rhythm of confession and forgiveness in our life, our church, our culture and indeed our agriculture. He lends unexpected grace to the areas of our life that feel repetitive, mundane and shabby. He brings an honesty to our simple liturgy, setting it aglow.

Beyond church, we live in a time of transition when embarrassment and shame could do untold harm. If we want to emerge well, we would do well to attend to the litter. Litter clearance is hard. It is more than a metaphor for our sin. Our local street cleaner stores his trolley here at All Saints, so I would like to revisit the thanksgiving prayer we said for his predecessor some time ago:

Lord, we want forgiveness, but would like it painless, so we hardly notice it; for we are embarrassed that you have to clear up our mess. Then, feeling vaguely absolved we go out and about and, with casual arrogance, or with brow-furrowed thoughtlessness, we litter our own streets.

But each morning, with bright purpose, ipod ready, brushes, trolley and bags, someone puts on a high-vis jacket, so becoming invisible. From Howard Road to the Railway Bridge, up and down, up and down, they collect fifty, sixty, seventy bags a day, offering a tireless absolution for the street.

Pausing to remember these street cleaners who set out from our Centre each day, we admit we would soon miss them if they stopped. We admit our averted gaze, embarrassed that someone, like you, deals with our debris.

As we thank you for them, prompt us to thank them for you.

Amen.

We affirm our faith

We stand, and at home, if able, we turn toward church.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen**

(Common Worship)

INTERCESSIONS

In confidence and trust, let us pray to our God:

For those who forgive us time without number,
who mediate your steadfast covenant love to us:

God, hear us

All: God, graciously hear us.

For those who long to know forgiveness
yet cannot receive it, through shame or guilt or fear:

God, hear us

God, graciously hear us.

For those who clean up our messes,
whose dirty work we despise and yet rely on daily:

God, hear us

God, graciously hear us.

For the patient, long-suffering earth, the multitudinous seas and rivers, the
astonishing variety of plants and animals, which absorb our hubris and suffer
our rampaging greed:

God, hear us

God, graciously hear us.

For countries and communities enslaved in debt,
for nations paying the price of colonialism and aggressive foreign policy:

God, hear us

God, graciously hear us.

For those caught in despairing cycles of addiction, punishment, violence and self-recrimination, and for those who stand with them to show them a better way:

God, hear us

God, graciously hear us.

For those caught in dead end jobs or hopeless unemployment, or in work that squeezes every last ounce of energy out of them, each longing for release:

God, hear us

God, graciously hear us.

For those in our law-courts, prisons, probation services and community centres, working for justice and restitution in an imperfect, under-resourced system:

God, hear us

God, graciously hear us.

For those whose sickness of mind or body is at least partly caused through an inability to forgive themselves or receive the forgiveness of others, and for all who seek to minister to them:

God, hear us

God, graciously hear us.

For our bishops and clergy, lay leaders and teachers, that they may be as ready to receive as to offer forgiveness, that they may be quick to confess and repent of wrong-doing and lead the way in acts of reconciling service:

God, hear us

God, graciously hear us.

For our churches and local communities, that they may be places of lavish grace, pardon and acceptance, where sinners know themselves to be in good company with others, where all depend upon the goodness and mercy of God:

God, hear us
God, graciously hear us.

For ourselves and those we live with daily and love most dearly, that we may grow in our capacity to forgive and be forgiven, and thus be prepared more nearly for the joyous life of heaven: and for our brothers and sisters, freed in God's abundant forgiveness, who have gone before us:

God, hear us
God, graciously hear us.

A prayer of Janet Morley's based on the Lord's Prayer

God our redeemer,
you have promised
liberation for our world:
remission of debts,
forgiveness of sins.
Deliver us, body, mind and spirit
from the grip of all that is evil;
and may we who claim the blessing of release
have courage to live by it,
in the name of him who died to set us free,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE PEACE

At home, you might turn in the direction of Church again and place your hands crossed over your heart, imagining our fellowship and anticipating our return. In Church David asks all present to make the same gesture, but turning outwards to imagine the whole parish and pray for its peace.

Bless the Lord, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

(Psalm 103:1a; 4b; 17)

We say together:

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

MUSIC (in church) Concerto in G minor: Sarabande *(George Frideric Handel)*

HYMN (recording) [Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us](#)

1. Lead us, heav'nly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing ev'ry blessing
if our God our Father be.

2. Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us,
all our weakness thou dost know,
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

3. Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heav'nly joy,
love with ev'ry passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy;
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

(James Edmeston)

The Table is prepared in Church. At home, now is the time to say the Lord's Prayer (below) and consume the food and drink you have prepared, first praying:

God, we long for Communion. With this symbolic meal stir my hope for the fellowship meal we cannot yet see, and help me wait for it with patience. **Amen.**

(cf Romans 8:2)

We give thanks for God's faithfulness and presence

Priest: The Lord is here

All: His Spirit is with us.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is right to praise you, Father, Lord of all creation; in your love you made us for yourself. When we turned away you did not reject us, but came to meet us in your Son.

You embraced us as your children and welcomed us to sit and eat with you.

In Christ you shared our life that we might live in him and he in us.

**He opened his arms of love upon the cross
and made for all the perfect sacrifice for sin.**

On the night he was betrayed, at supper with his friends he took bread and gave you thanks; he broke it and gave it to them, saying: Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.

**Father we do this in remembrance of him:
his body is the bread of life.**

A bell is rung

At the end of supper, taking the cup of wine, he gave you thanks and said: Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins; do this in remembrance of me.

**Father we do this in remembrance of him:
his blood is shed for all.**

A bell is rung

Send your Holy Spirit that this bread and wine may be to us the body and blood of your dear Son.

**As we eat and drink these holy gifts,
make us one in Christ, our Risen Lord.**

With your whole church throughout the world we offer you this sacrifice of praise, lifting our voice to join the eternal song of heaven:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**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.**

Priest: We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All: Though we are many, we are one body.
For we all share in one bread.**

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Blessed are those who are called to his supper.

**Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
But only say the word and I shall be healed.**

We pause to remember all who pray at home, then share the bread and wine, now for us the body and blood of Christ.

ANTHEM during Communion [Bread is blessed and broken](#)

1. Bread is blessed and broken, wine is blessed and poured:
take this and remember Christ the Lord.
2. Share the food of heaven earth cannot afford.
Here is grace in essence – Christ the Lord.
3. Know yourself forgiven, find yourself restored,
meet a friend for ever – Christ the Lord.
4. God has kept his promise sealed by sign and word:
here, for those who want him – Christ the Lord.

(John L Bell & Graham Maule)

**Inside or outside
we are sent to serve**

Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with your Word [and with the body and blood of Christ]. Strengthen us in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. **Amen.**

We imagine our scattered fellowship, family and colleagues and all our neighbours praying for blessing on all:

THE BLESSING

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage, hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour everyone, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

HYMN [How shall I sing that majesty](#)

1. How shall I sing that majesty

which angels do admire?

Let dust in dust and silence lie;
sing, sing, ye heav'nly choir.
Thousands of thousands stand around
thy throne, O God most high;
ten thousand times ten thousand sound
thy praise; but who am I?

whilst I thy footsteps trace;
a sound of God comes to my ears,
but they behold thy face.
They sing because thou art their Sun;
Lord, send a beam on me;
for where heav'n is but once begun
there alleluias be.

2. Thy brightness unto them appears,
 3. How great a being, Lord, is thine,
which doth all beings keep!
Thy knowledge is the only line
to sound so vast a deep.
Thou art a sea without a shore,
a sun without a sphere;
thy time is now and evermore,
thy place is ev'rywhere.

(John Mason)

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

VOLUNTARY [Dance](#) *(Peter Lawrance; played by Martha Ann Brookes & Benjamin Noakes)*

A seasonal vegetarian dish around which to gather, inspired by the River Café, showing those who eat vegetables are to be admired, not pitied (Romans 14:2).

Roast a pile of peeled pumpkin or butternut squash chunks with some oil and oregano, salt and pepper until soft. Mash with a fork and set aside. Heat some oil in a sauté pan and soften a finely chopped onion and a similar amount of finely chopped celery for 5 minutes or so. Add some chopped garlic, a good pinch of chilli flakes, some more oregano and a cinnamon stick, or a good pinch of ground cinnamon, and stir together. Add your risotto rice (Arborio or Carnaroli) and stir to coat well. Add a tin of chopped tomatoes and stir, reducing the liquid slowly. Then have some good vegetable stock simmering on the stove and add a ladle at a time, stirring well and only adding more when each ladle full has been absorbed. When the rice is just about done, stir in the pumpkin and heat through gently. Taste and season with salt and pepper. Serve drizzled with Extra Virgin Olive Oil and finely grated Pecorino cheese.