



*St Paul's*  
**United  
Reformed  
Church**

*Minister:*  
**Revd. Martin Knight**  
07392 463961 [minister1@stpaulsurc.org.uk](mailto:minister1@stpaulsurc.org.uk)

*Church Secretaries:*  
**Sue Eardley**  
07971 068887 [eardleys@virginmedia.com](mailto:eardleys@virginmedia.com)  
**Bea Pollard**  
020 8657 0162 [ronandbea@btinternet.com](mailto:ronandbea@btinternet.com)

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# Order of Service/reflection

*Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020*



*Welcome to St Paul's!*

*Please use 'T' on your hearing aid if you need to use the Hearing Loop.*

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This morning's service is being led by: **Bea Pollard**  
The Organ is played by: **Richard Mander**

## Important notes:

- It is a joy to welcome you to this service!  
St Paul's URC has a **full Covid-19 Risk Assessment**, which is helping to keep everyone safe, so please follow the notices and advice you are given in church.
  - As you can see, we are using printed **Order sheets rather than Hymn books and bibles**. These Orders have been prepared in clean conditions and quarantined for 36hrs before the service.
  - **Offertory** – to reduce contact with physical notes and coins at this time, Standing Orders and bank transfers are preferred, but there is also a labelled collection box at the side, where you can place your offertory.
  - Until government guidance changes, there will be **no congregational singing** during our services, but we will find other creative ways of using music!
  - Our service will be **broadcast via zoom**. Folk at home will be able to see and hear us and we will be able to see them. If you would rather not be seen, you can move to the right-hand-side of the pews on your right.
  - We pray that you will know God's presence as we worship – in church, at home, online, in the garden, at work or school, and in all places.
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## Welcome and Notices

### Call to Worship

O Lord,  
Open our eyes to your Presence  
Open our minds to your grace  
Open our lips to your praises  
Open our hearts to your love  
Open our lives to your healing  
And be found among us. Amen

# News from the Church Family

## *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, for ever and ever.  
Amen

## **HYMN for reflection: Here, where your people**

1. Here where your people  
Have often sung your praises,  
we come to seek your Spirit,  
your blessing as we pray.  
Lead us in caring, helping and sharing:  
help us and guide us, day after day.
2. Here in our city,  
where walls of fear divide us,  
each church must share true friendship  
and witness to your way: lives interweaving, new hope achieving;  
loving our neighbours, day after day.
3. Here, in this nation,  
with wealth amassed through empire,

we now must work for fairness,  
help others have their say.  
Keep us campaigning, debtors unchaining;  
working for justice, day after day.

4. Called as one people  
from ev'ry tribe and nation,  
we've much to learn from others,  
if we would go your way.  
Graft us together, one vine for ever;  
Vibrant and fruitful, day after day!

*John Campbell*

**Reading:** New Testament: Matthew 18: 21 – 35

### **Forgiveness and the unforgiving servant**

**21** 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?" **22** Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. **23** "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

**24** When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; **25** 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. **26** So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' **27** And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

**28** 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.'

**29** Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' **30** But he refused; then he went and threw

him into prison until he would pay the debt. **31** 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. **32** Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?" **34** And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. **35** So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

## **Talk to church family My cutlery drawer**

Today's reading began with Peter asking a question about how often we should put up with another Christian sinning against us. He asked if it would have to be as many as seven times. "No", said Jesus, not seven times, seventy time seven. Now, how many is that? Jesus liked to shock people into thinking about what he said. Here, he is telling us that we should be totally committed to forgiving others, so much so there would be no point keeping track of the times someone had wronged you, because it would take so long to get to 490. And he is also telling us that everyone sins to some extent, which is where my cutlery drawer comes in.

.....

Would it not be wrong of me, knowing that I have held on to something which is not my own, if I were to spend my time taking care that no-one touches even the smallest of my possessions – guarding the flowers that poke under the front fence, hanging notices on the raspberry bushes to stop next door from picking any that grow over to their side. I could get quite obsessive about it, but I mustn't really, because I know that I have done wrong things myself.

Now, the story that Jesus told about the two men who owed money is all about someone getting what was owed to him out of proportion. Perhaps it would help if we knew a bit more about the value of money in Jesus's

time. A denarius was the usual day's wage for a labourer, so the debt of a hundred denarii, was 100 days' pay and the first servant threw the second one into prison for not paying it. A talent, on the other hand was worth more than fifteen years pay, so the first servant's debt of ten thousand talents was astronomical – But Jesus tells us that from God's point of view both debts should be forgiven. All human sin is wrong, but luckily for us God's mercy is infinite.

The words of the hymn we're going to think about now tell us that, very clearly.

### **HYMN for reflection:** There's a wideness in God's mercy

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

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

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

*F.W. Faber*

As the Junior church leave for their own activities, we bless each other with the words of the Grace: **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen**

### **Prayer**

When we are irritated for the seventh time

And it feels like seventy times seven...  
Help us to remember your patience with us.

When we are asked to be patient again and again...  
Help us to remember your pity for us

When our pity is taken for granted  
Again and again....

Help us to remember your challenge to us  
When we challenge unfairness  
Over and over...

Help us to remember your love surrounding us all  
Amen

### **Hymn for reflection:**

**Kyrie, Eleison**, Lord, have mercy upon us, Christ, have mercy upon us.

## ***Sermon: Extravagance***

Today we have been looking at one of the stories Jesus told to illustrate his point about forgiveness. As he did so often, he used metaphors taken from the world of finance. Nowadays we aren't very familiar with the coinage referred to in this parable, but it certainly helped me to interpret it when I discovered that the first slave's debt was phenomenal: a thousand times the revenues of Galilee, Judea, Samaria and Idumea put together and obviously totally unrepayable, despite the debtor's pleas that he would repay everything if the king would only have patience with him. And he was forgiven. Then, what happens? He attacks a fellow slave who owes a comparatively trifling amount and exacts payment with violence and the full force of the law.

Now, when we hear this story, we tend to sympathise with the second servant, the imprisoned one – although I have to admit that, in the days before I knew the colossal difference between the two debts I had a sneaking sympathy with the first slave, he knew he owed money and was trying to scrape it together as best he could. Now, of course, I realise that this story illustrates God’s great forgiveness of even the most astonishing level of sin – and it becomes plain that we are meant to find his behaviour appalling.

Then I realised that this parable is rather like the story that Nathan told King David about a rich man exploiting a poor one and, once we exclaim, like David, “That man must pay four times over because he did such a thing and had no pity”, then we are told, as Nathan told David: “You are the man”. Now, my moment of realisation came when I looked in Alex Mabb’s website for some commentary to this parable to discover the specific relevance of this story to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In brief, for centuries the rich world, centred in Europe and North America has maintained its advantage by exploiting what we choose to call the undeveloped world. In the past we exploited the inhabitants, as slave labour, now we continue to plunder the rainforests for timber, devastate the land with opencast mining, send mighty trawlers to strip the sea beds round their coasts of all forms of life..... and so it goes. We have systems in place to ensure that European and American businesses and financial interests can avoid tax south of the Sahara, but we are quick to react to stories of corruption among the peoples of those countries. According to figures from the World Bank, debt in emerging and developing economies (EMDEs) climbed to a record US\$55 trillion in 2018. This figure is unlikely to have improved during the pandemic.

Now, apart from our usual everyday carelessness about clean water, fossil fuels and plastic that characterises our society and could well be said to be accumulating a debt that we owe our planet, I don’t think any of the



super-rich exploiters attend these services – but we all belong to a society that tolerates their existence and their behaviour – especially if it enlarges our pension funds.

We also belong to a society and a civilisation that sent our excess population overseas to make new lives in countries whose original inhabitants were forcibly displaced and frequently victims of genocide, yet today we read panicked headlines about invasions from the worlds' poor as refugees, try to get a share in the wealth of the west, sailing in rubber dinghies, tossed about in the busiest shipping lane in the world, full of cargo vessels which are not intended to benefit them.

Jesus's words about forgiving seventy times seven are exaggerated, and the love of God is extravagant and lavish. That's what John Newton discovered when he acknowledged his wickedness as a slave trader, repented and wrote the beloved hymn "Amazing Grace". We cannot measure God's forgiving love, but we must examine our own behaviour and values as we strive to become worthy of our bounteous and infinitely forgiving Father in heaven.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

O God, enlarge our hearts that they may be big enough to receive the greatness of your love. Stretch our hearts that they may take in all those who with me around the world believe in Jesus Christ.

Stretch them that they may take into them all those who do not know him, but who are our responsibility because we know him.

And stretch them that they may take in all those who are not lovely in our eyes,  
Through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

Let us say a prayer for those who need to be remembered this morning;  
Those who have made the news headlines this week: policy makers,  
health professionals and refugees  
May God strengthen and guide them.

Those who have been brought to our attention through a meeting or conversation... friends who are ill, Martin...those who are caring for loved ones who are suffering  
May God strengthen and comfort them

Those who need to forget the God they don't believe in and meet the God who believes in them..

Lord, we believe that you hear our prayer and will be faithful to your promise to answer us.

When our eyes open

May they do so,

Not to end our devotions,

But to expect your kingdom,

For Jesus sake, Amen.

## **HYMN for reflection: Amazing Grace**

1. Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)

that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,

was blind, but now i see.

2. As grace first taught my heart to fear

so grace my fears relieved

how precious did that grace appear

the hour I first believed!

3. Through many dangers, toils and snares

I have already come;

God's grace has brought me safe thus far,

and he will lead me home.

4. The Lord has promised good to me,  
His word my hoe secures;  
He will my shield and portion be  
as long as life endures;

5. and when this heart and flesh shall fail  
and mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the veil  
A life of joy and peace.

*John Newton*

### **Sending forth & Blessing**

As we prepare to leave  
And embrace the challenges  
Of our lives and our world  
Let us ask for God's blessing.

May God bless us with strength to seek justice  
May God bless us with wisdom to care for our earth  
May God bless us with love to bring forth new life  
In the name of God, the maker of the world,  
Of Jesus, our new covenant,  
And of the Holy Spirit, who opens minds and hearts,  
Go in peace and be witnesses to hope,  
Thanks be to God Amen.

## **Information & Notices**

*We extend a very warm welcome to you!*

**Synod meeting – Tuesday 29 Sept, 7.30-9.30pm**

All welcome – join by Zoom

Main Topic. **Do Black Lives Matter in the URC?** -  
a presentation by Karen Campbell URC Secretary for  
Global and Intercultural Ministries  
Zoom: Meeting ID 862 0013 3536 Passcode: 240443  
Contact Sue or Bea for an agenda

**Table Top Sale –Saturday 10 October 9.30-12.20**  
Covid secure arrangements – limited stalls and restricted  
entry but plenty for everyone. In aid of for Youth Council.  
Contact Chris Dean for details

**Wine Tasting (virtual). Saturday 17 Oct 7-10pm**  
Let Dennis Simmonds know if you'd like a pack by 24  
September

## **United Prayer**

*for St Paul's and South Croydon United Church*

**Friday evenings at 7:30-8:00pm**

*Recurring 'Zoom' log-in details:*

*Meeting ID: 845 5391 2820*

*Password: 496554*



**St Paul's United Reformed Church**

*Croham Park Avenue, South Croydon, CR2 7HF [www.stpaulsurc.org.uk](http://www.stpaulsurc.org.uk)*

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