

READINGS AND REFLECTION FOR SUNDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2020
13th Sunday after Trinity

Psalm 149

1 Alleluia.

O sing to the Lord a new song; ♦
sing his praise in the congregation of the faithful.

2 Let Israel rejoice in their maker; ♦
let the children of Zion be joyful in their king.

3 Let them praise his name in the dance; ♦
let them sing praise to him with timbrel and lyre.

4 For the Lord has pleasure in his people ♦
and adorns the poor with salvation.

5 Let the faithful be joyful in glory; ♦
let them rejoice in their ranks,

6 With the praises of God in their mouths ♦
and a two-edged sword in their hands;

7 To execute vengeance on the nations ♦
and punishment on the peoples;

8 To bind their kings in chains ♦
and their nobles with fetters of iron;

9 To execute on them the judgement decreed: ♦
such honour have all his faithful servants.

Alleluia.

Romans 13.8-14

8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. 11 Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12 the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13 let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Matthew 18.15-20

15 "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Reflection – this week from Mary-Lou

Some people have hidden depths. I have a hidden shallow! If I'm around when it's on, I watch Neighbours to relax. As in most soap operas, the storylines often centre on conflict arising between people who live on Ramsey Street – rows, pain, trouble, you name it. But one thing I've noticed over the years is that the trouble is resolved. Conflicts, rows, arguments, hurt – it is rarely left to fester. In the Land of Neighbours, things are sorted out, usually in real reconciliation – with family relationships and friendships restored. In real life, tragically that is often not the case.

In this week's Gospel, we hear how Christians are to handle this kind of trouble when it breaks out amongst them. That's a bit of a reassurance really, it seems right from the start Jesus knew things wouldn't always be peace and light in the life of the Church. His teaching is clear. What we can't do is just leave things alone and try to forget them! Nor can we indulge in getting other people on our side, so we can go into battle against the person who has offended us. Jesus says don't leave things, start by going to see the person who's caused the hurt and talk, just one to one. See if you can sort it out between you. That takes quite a lot of courage. It means both people need to admit that something is wrong and then they have to face up to it. It's hard for the one who has been hurt, it may be ever harder for the one who's done the hurting. But Jesus says we should keep it between the two of us and see if we can reach a better place. If we can't, only then do we bring in just a couple of other members of the Church, and if reconciliation is still not possible, finally comes separation. What we don't do is ambush someone at a PCC meeting, or in front of the congregation ... Some of us may have witnessed real harm happening to individuals and churches when hurt and anger explode in wrong and even evil ways. We need to remember of course that Jesus would not have been talking about a church like those we know – he was almost certainly thinking of small, gatherings, more like a house group or a cell church – little groups, meeting to pray together. Personal conflict within small gatherings like that would have the potential to blow them apart completely.

True reconciliation is very, very hard. But we have to work at it, for trying to pretend a serious hurt didn't happen is never going to work. The message is that we need to face it when relationships are out of kilter, deal privately and gently with each other whenever we can, but ultimately not tolerate injustice and wrong. For this has the power to destroy Christian community, just as it can destroy families and societies when left unchecked. It'll ask forgiveness of us – not any papering over the cracks, no just trying to forget: as Tom Wright says, forgiveness is for when it really does matter, when we're really hurt and damaged. We'll be walking in the way of the cross – but we can be encouraged by that most precious promise on the lips of Jesus: *For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.* In Christ's presence, no spite, no hardening of our hearts, has any place. The Holy One is with us.