

**READINGS AND REFLECTION FOR SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2020**  
**14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**Psalm 114**

- 1 When Israel came out of Egypt, ◆  
the house of Jacob from a people of a strange tongue,  
2 Judah became his sanctuary, ◆  
Israel his dominion.  
3 The sea saw that, and fled; ◆  
Jordan was driven back.  
4 The mountains skipped like rams, ◆  
the little hills like young sheep.  
5 What ailed you, O sea, that you fled? ◆  
O Jordan, that you were driven back?  
6 You mountains, that you skipped like rams, ◆  
you little hills like young sheep?  
7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, ◆  
at the presence of the God of Jacob,  
8 Who turns the hard rock into a pool of water, ◆  
the flint-stone into a springing well.

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**Romans 14.1-12**

1 Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. 2 Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. 3 Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. 5 Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. 6 Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God. 7 We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die,

we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." 12 So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

### **Matthew 18.21-35**

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."

## **Reflection – this week from Mary-Lou**

There was a time when you used to see people wearing small rectangular badges that just had numbers on them – they read like a little maths question:  $70 \times 7$ . Of course, those were in the days when we could actually get near enough to someone else to read what a badge said! It seems a world away in social distancing, doesn't it? The badges went to the heart of this week's Gospel, and to the heart of our Christian faith. Peter went to Jesus and asked him how many times he should forgive, could it be as many as 7 times? Jesus's answer must have shocked him: Not seven times, but 77 times, or in another reading, seventy times seven. In other words, just keep forgiving, forgive so many times it's impossible to keep a count!

And then he told the parable where a servant who owed 10,000 talents has his debt forgiven. Now that's a huge amount – maybe something like £5 billion in our day! An eye-watering amount of debt, wiped out through the merciful heart of his lord, to whom it was owed and who heard the pleas of his servant and had compassion, for this man and his family. But then the same servant, who is owed just 10,000 denarii by one of his fellow-slaves, comes across him immediately after receiving mercy himself, and treats him with violence, closing his heart to the same plea for patience and pity. Jesus teaches us that when we first receive such unbounded mercy from God our Father, receiving forgiveness for ourselves, we must have forgiving hearts towards others. This is the economy of the Kingdom of God. And that great sting in the tail makes it absolutely clear forgiving is not optional for those who love God.

How many times have we prayed 'Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us?' And yet just how hard is it, to live with a forgiving heart? Little hurts can be brushed off, forgotten – perhaps moaned about a bit, but let go in the end. Deep hurts from a friend, undeserved wounding, violence or abuse at the hands of others - these are gut-wrenchingly hard. Forgiveness is one of the things Christians are mocked for – others see it as pathetic in the face of something dreadful. As we've heard before in these reflections, forgiveness is precisely for those deepest of hurts, when it is so hard to forgive. But I believe forgiveness sometimes needs to be more a process through time than the blink of an eye. And I believe our God loves us through it all. Perhaps when we feel we are unable to reach the point of forgiveness, our prayer can be 'Dear God, help me want to want to forgive?'

Jesus teaches us that there is no limit to forgiveness. We are to live as if with hands and heart continually open - open always to the mercy and forgiveness of God for ourselves, but also open to bestow the same gifts on those who wound us. As Jesus put it in Matthew 10, Freely you have received, freely give. It's tough stuff, trying to follow in Christ's way. God be with you.