

## Tarves Parish Church - Sunday 22 March



**“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”**

You might like to read the following hymn slowly. Think carefully about the meaning of the words as you do so.

### **CH4 484**

1. 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
2. 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.

3. 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.
  
4. 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.
  
5. 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.

Are there any words or phrases that speak to you in the circumstances we find ourselves today? Which are the ones you want to say to God in particular?

### **Bible Reading**

In our Lenten series on the Lord's prayer we have reached the petition, "**Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors**". The following bible reading focuses on forgiveness. Again read it slowly.

#### **St John 7:53 - 8:11**

*Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the Temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.*

*Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'*

## **Reflection**

Now go back and read that passage a second time. Picture yourself in the crowd with a stone in your hand. At whom are you tempted to throw it? Then hear those words of Jesus addressed to everyone, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' How do you feel? What will you do with your stone?

A local councillor was once asked what the most important thing that the Church should be doing to reconnect with the local community. His response was "Let go the stones". Too often the Church has had a reputation for being judgemental. Sometimes that reputation is justified. Sometimes less so. Perhaps we are all guilty of rushing to judge and blame. There is a real temptation to look for a scapegoat for the current crisis – China, the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the NHS. Some even point the finger at God.

But in that bible reading from John's Gospel, Jesus refuses to join the crowd who are determined to stone the woman caught in adultery. He encourages the crowd to think about their own lives, to recognise their own weaknesses and to let go their stones. Here is a reminder that central to the Christian faith is not condemnation but forgiveness.

In the approach to Easter we have been thinking in Church about the Lord's prayer and what it has to teach us about God, about ourselves as well as about prayer. Today we come to the words, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". When we pray the Lord's prayer we are reminded that at the heart of the Christian faith is the importance of forgiveness, the need to be forgiven but also the need to be forgiving.

On the cross, Jesus prayed, “Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do”. As he gave his life for the life of the world, Jesus laid aside the stones of rejection and loneliness and bitterness and blame. And he invites us to do the same. But true forgiveness is costly and often accompanied by tears — our tears and God’s tears.

The way we live our lives can have potentially devastating consequences for ourselves, for others, for the planet on which we live. We are currently discovering the consequences of years of underfunding of the NHS, social services and emergency services in which we as tax payers or voters are all complicit. No amount of forgiveness can undo the present crisis. No amount of forgiveness can magic away Covid-19 and its potentially deadly consequences. But it can allow us to move forward differently as forgiven and forgiving people. In the assurance of God’s promise of life now and in the future we can reflect to our own community the same love and grace which God shows to us.

The life of John Newton is an example of how this change is possible. Newton was a minister in the 1700’s and he wrote many great hymns. But Newton was not always a minister and hymn writer. He began life at sea and eventually captained a slave ship. It was only after a religious experience, an encounter with the living God, that he became a minister and an ardent campaigner for the abolition of slavery. His hymns have brought hope and inspiration to many people in difficult times in the intervening centuries. And perhaps the best known of these is Amazing Grace which reminds us of the forgiveness of God that is central to life.

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. 'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And 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.  
'Tis Grace hath brought me safe thus far  
And Grace will lead me home.

4. When we've been there ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.

### **Prayer of Confession**

Take a moment now to say sorry for the things which you have done that may have hurt God, other people and the world of which we are a part...

Then think about those who have hurt you and make a conscious decision to forgive them...

Then rest in the peace of God knowing that you have been forgiven.

Think about the words of the following hymn.

### **CH4 361**

1. Forgiveness is your gift,  
Both cleansing and renewing,  
To catch us when we drift,  
Our base desires pursuing;  
And hug us back to life  
And bring us to a feast  
Where all will celebrate  
The life your love released.
  
2. Your grace goes out to meet  
The sinful and the doubting  
Your arms and dancing feet  
Speak louder than all shouting:  
O God how great your love  
Which takes us empty in,  
And with our worth unproved,  
lets better life begin.

We may not feel like feasting and celebrating at present but that day will surely come...

### **Prayers for Others**

In the light of that day lift to God now

- those who are seeking to manage and fight this global pandemic
- family, friends and neighbours (particularly all mothers on this Mother's Day)
- other people and situations who are in your hearts today
- the Church that we might offer a faithful witness to Christ through this time

You might like to close by saying the Lord's 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 debts as we forgive our debtors  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever,  
Amen