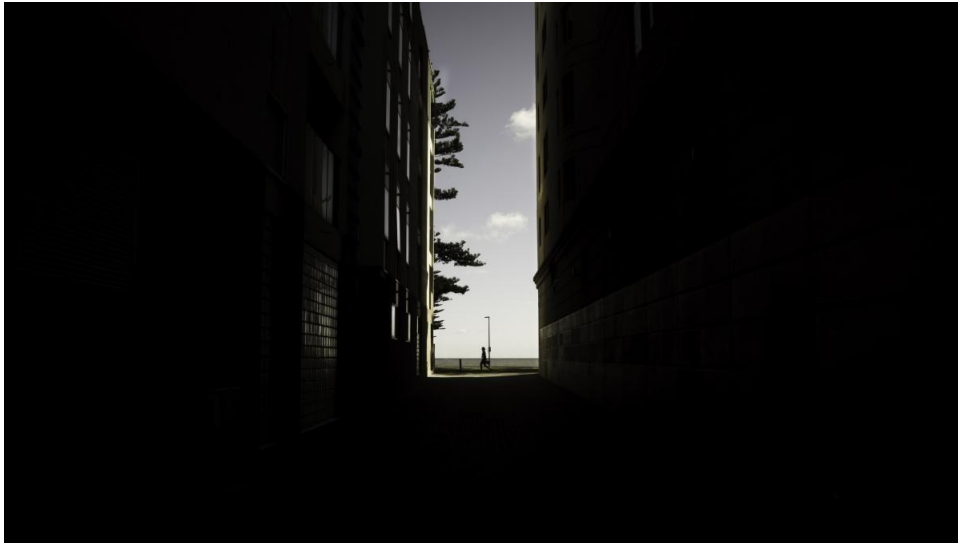


## Barthol Chapel and Tarves Sunday 13 September 2020

### Worship Materials



**“The kingdom of God may be compared to....”**

#### Introduction

Over the next few weeks we will be looking at some of the parables of Jesus and thinking about how these stories might challenge us to see and live differently.

#### Praise CH4 172 Sing for God’s glory

1 Sing for God’s glory that colours the dawn of creation  
Racing across the sky, trailing bright clouds of elation  
Sun of delight  
Succeeds the velvet of night  
Warming the earth’s exultation.

2. Sing for God’s power that shatters the chains that would bind us,  
Searing the darkness of fear and despair  
That could blind us  
Touching our shame  
With love that will not lay blame  
Reaching out gently to find us.

3. Sing for God’s justice disturbing each easy illusion  
Tearing down tyrants and putting our pride to confusion,  
Lifeblood of right  
Resisting evil and slight  
Offering freedom’s transfusion.

4. Sing for God’s saints who have travelled faith’s journey before us  
Who in our weariness give us their hope to restore us  
In them we see  
The new creation to be  
Spirit of love made flesh for us.

#### The Word of God: St 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. <sup>28</sup>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." <sup>29</sup>Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." <sup>30</sup>But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup>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. <sup>32</sup>Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup>Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" <sup>34</sup>And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. <sup>35</sup>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

The hymn Amazing Grace was one of many written by John Newton. It is a very old favourite. It was closely associated with the African American abolition of slavery movement. And the story behind it is one that has struck a chord with people down through the centuries.

John Newton was a minister in the 1700's. But he began his working life at sea. In 1745 at the age of 20, Newton found himself a servant of a powerful nation of slave traders in what is now Sierra Leone. He was brutally abused. In 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known his father. Despite this experience, Newton kept his involvement in the slave trade, eventually becoming captain of his own ship.

On one journey, during a violent storm, John had a religious experience. When all seemed lost and the ship seemed destined to sink, Newton prayed, "Lord have mercy upon us". Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

Gradually his life began to change and he was ordained as an Anglican minister in 1684. However it was not until 1788, 34 years after leaving it, that he renounced his former slaving profession. He began to campaign for its abolition, publishing a tract called "Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade." The tract described the horrific conditions on slave ships and Newton apologized for making a public statement so many years after participating in the trade: "It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders."

The pamphlet was so popular it was reprinted several times and sent to every member of Parliament. Under the leadership of William Wilberforce, the English civil government outlawed slavery in Great Britain in 1807 and Newton lived to see it, dying in December of that year.

The hymn Amazing Grace was written in 1772, and it celebrates the grace and forgiveness of God which he himself had experienced and which is central to the Christian faith. And it is this forgiveness that is the subject of our bible reading today.

Familiarity has perhaps blunted the impact of Jesus parable. It is, like many of Jesus stories, bordering on the absurd. In this story we have a rich and powerful ruler. One of his servants owes him a debt. But the figure given for that debt – 10,000 talents -is ridiculously high. One talent alone was equal to 15 years pay for a labourer. 10,000 talents would have been the equivalent of 100 million days wages for the average worker. The historian Josephus tells us that at that time, the total tax for all Judeaens combined only came to 600 talents. So as Jesus tells the story, this man owes the king more money than was in circulation in Judea at the time. There is no way it could ever be repaid. And the king writes it off – just like that!

Clearly Jesus is employing hyperbole here. This huge exaggeration on Jesus part is deliberate. It is part of his story-telling technique. Jesus is trying to give people a picture of God that is far bigger, grander, deeper, and more amazing than we can possibly imagine. But this is only the beginning of Jesus story. The man who has been forgiven so much debt goes away. And what does he do? He meets someone who owes him money - a mere hundred denarii – a tiny amount compared with the debt from which he himself has been released. And when that man cannot pay him back he has his debtor thrown into prison. Of course word gets back to the king – and the man finds himself handed over to be tortured until he can repay his own debt - a debt that is wholly unrepayable.

In this story Jesus invites his hearers to consider the whole chain of events. Because God's grace should generate a whole chain of events. God's mercy should generate further mercy on our part. Jesus taught his followers to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors". Forgiveness and compassion bring release and freedom for others and ourselves. It is by forgiving others that we accept God's forgiveness and find true freedom and fulfilment. Those who know the compassion of God cannot experience the freedom it brings unless they are prepared to show compassion to others.

So what might this story be saying to us today? Well one way of looking at that story might be to recognise that in seeking repayment of the tiny sum due to him, the unforgiving man is acting within his rights – he is taking what is his due. Yet in the circumstances his actions are outrageous – he has just had millions of pounds of debt written off and here he is pursuing someone for pennies. Perhaps Jesus is trying to draw people's attention away from mere recognition of legal rights towards the importance of acts of compassion that go way beyond rights or rules. It is not rules and regulations that bring about freedom and release – it is forgiveness and compassion. That is what the man in our story was lacking – the king had it in spades but the man was only interested in what was owed to him.

But the model of God's kingdom is not about entitlement. Nor is it based on rules and regulations. Rather it is about what we can give – the compassion and release we can offer to others.

I don't know about you but right now I feel hemmed in by rules and regulations. Keeping up with Government guidelines about coronavirus is really stressful – "surely I'm allowed to do this" - I frequently wonder. Or in a slightly different vein - why do pubs and restaurants only have one meter distancing when the Church have to have two? Why must we wear face-coverings if we are two metres apart? Why must we clean every week if the virus dies out after 72 hours? Surely the Church is entitled to more consideration than this?"

But a preoccupation with what we are allowed (or not allowed to do) can blind us to that very different requirement of God's kingdom – that of compassion. Compassion demands that we go further than rules and regulations and act in the interests of the safety of people who are greatest at risk, those who are still virtual prisoners in their own homes. And perhaps it is only when people are prepared to go above and beyond the rules in the interests of all, that this cruel disease will be driven out – allowing freedom to the most vulnerable who are still living virtually as prisoners in their homes.

It took him some time, but John Newton was eventually able to share the gift of compassion that he had received from God with those who were suffering the indignity and inhumanity of slavery. And perhaps it was only at that point that his life reached its true fulfilment.

And that leaves us with the question, What will we do with the grace and compassion that God has shown to us? Will we use our freedom for our own advantage? Or will we use the gift of compassion to help bring freedom to all?

### Pointers for Prayer

- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- All key workers, those adjusting to working from home and those who are returning to their workplace •
- The governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and their advisers as they seek to guide us out of the restrictions
- University staff and students as they prepare to begin
- Businesses struggling and all who are facing redundancy and financial hardship
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the restrictions and those finding it difficult to move forward
- Those who have lost a loved one during the pandemic
- Churches as each take difficult decisions whether to re-open for worship and how best to implement health and safety measures
- Friends in Udney Pitmedden as they hear Reverend Gert Janse van Rensburg preach for their vacancy.

### Praise CH4 352 O for a thousand tongues

1 O for a thousand tongues, to sing  
My great Redeemer's praise  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of his grace!

2. Jesus! The name that charms our fears  
That bids our sorrows cease  
'tis music in the sinner's ears  
'tis life and health and peace.

3. He breaks the power of cancelled sin  
He sets the prisoner free  
His blood can make the foulest clean  
His blood availed for me.

6. My gracious Master and my God  
Assist me to proclaim  
To spread through all the earth abroad  
The honours of thy name.

### Blessing

### Notices

#### Next Sunday 9.45am Joint Worship (Service commences 10.00am)

If you would like to be added to the e-mail list for the link to Sunday's live worship gathering on zoom or join in on your landline please contact:

Rob e-mail [sessionclerk@bartholchapel.org](mailto:sessionclerk@bartholchapel.org) or Susanna Tel 851345 or e-mail [smbichard@aol.com](mailto:smbichard@aol.com).

**Care in the Community** if you are aware of anyone in Tarves who needs help of any kind please contact Ruth 851887. If you are aware of anyone in Barthol Chapel who needs help please contact the Minister or James Hepburn 806611.

**Tuesday 11.00am** Tarves Session Coffee Morning

**Wednesday 9 September 4.30pm Barthol Chapel** Board and Session meeting on Zoom

**Community Bible Experience** – As the next stage in our reading through the bible together we will be tackling the Prophets. There will be an 8 week reading plan with weekly meetings on zoom to talk about what we have read. All welcome – no need to have attended previous groups. Course will start after books have been received and distributed. For more information or a book (cost £5) and reading plan please contact Alison Tel 851295.