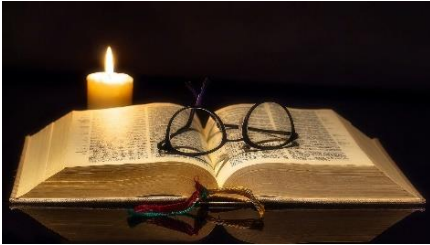


18th July 2021

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service set out below.

Opening Prayer: Holy and Almighty Father, thank you for your amazing grace shown to us in Jesus. Help us receive your mercy and transformed by your kindness, share this same mercy will all we meet. Revive us, your church, this nation, and your world, that we might acknowledge your holiness and practice truth and justice with mercy and love. **Amen.**

Song:

I love You, Lord
For Your mercy never fails me
All my days, I've been held in Your hands
From the moment that I wake up
Until I lay my head
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

*And all my life You have been faithful
And all my life You have been so, so good
With every breath that I am able
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God*

I love Your voice
You have led me through the fire
In the darkest night

You are close like no other
I've known You as a Father
I've known You as a Friend
And I have lived in the goodness of God

And all my life...

(Bridge) 'Cause Your goodness is running after
It's running after me
Your goodness is running after
It's running after me
With my life laid down
I'm surrendered now
I give You everything

And all my life...

Read: John 7:53-8:11 – God seeks our Success

A summary of the talk given by Howard Wright.

We continue our series in John's Gospel.

This story seems an interlude but, it's clearly a genuine story and it's consistent with the character of Jesus. Additionally, we don't know if John meant it to be here (see notes in most Bibles), but by the grace of God, it is! And as we shall see, it works here. So, what can we learn?

Jesus is being tested – the teachers of the law and Pharisees are determined to show him up and disclose him as a fraud, despite Jesus showing them up and disclosing himself as the genuine article.

In the previous verses the Jewish leaders and the people had been debating with Jesus about who he is. In this story we see a practical illustration of Jesus' revealing of God in dramatic contrast to the type of God the Pharisees and teachers of the Law are promoting.

This debate about the nature of God is more than an intellectual discussion. Our take on God has a dramatic impact in the way we treat others, and even our own, eternal destiny.

Jesus is being revealed as a bit soft on the law, and too generous with mercy. This is a law of Moses at stake, the very scriptures, the holy Word of God,

not just an interpretation, opinion, or addition by the latest scholars.

This woman is dragged unceremoniously to Jesus. She must be terrified, humiliated, utterly ashamed, and expecting judgement.

There's no debate that the woman has 'sinned'. But it's also an awful example of the merciless nature of a religion of law – and here the way the people with power make it work for them always at the cost of the vulnerable – as the expression goes, the least, the last and the lost.

And, where is the man? The teachers of the Law and Pharisees are correct this Law says death – but it says for both offenders!

BUT, the Law says death over us all – Psalm 143:2 says, *'And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous.'* And, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, says Romans 3:23.

The Ten Commandments are not like a school examine, 'please attempt four of the ten.' They demand our compliance with them all.

Even the best of us is not good enough for Heaven! And even the most arrogant of us, realise this; for most arrogance is a show to cover our inadequacy and self-doubt, and the fear of being found out.

Jesus' response is genius *'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.'* And he bends down and write on the ground.

We don't know what he wrote – apparently the rabbis of the day would often resort to writing in the dust (interactive wipe boards, having not been invented!) He may have doodled, whilst waiting for people to figure out what he'd said, challenging them to take him on. He may have started writing the Torah, the law, or even just the 10 commandments.

But slowly everyone twigged and moved away.

Who do associate with?

The Pharisees, it's the principle. She's broken the law, and the law says...

It's easy to judge. But have we seen ourselves? Read Matthew 7:1-5

The image they have of God is of one on their side, who judges anyone against them or their ideas harshly – they thought they were close to God and defending him, but they were wrong! What about us – have we got it right?

The woman: I wonder what she expected. I suspect most people would have expected harsh judgement.

What image of God do we have? Is he waiting to catch us out, or to catch us in? Notice, Jesus' treatment of the

woman at the well and his story of the prodigal son, for just two examples. God seeks our success.

But we also need to note, as Tom Wright says, 'Forgiveness is not the same a tolerance'. We all need forgiveness and transformation – *'go and sin no more.'* We need to constantly return to God for his mercy and daily seek his strength to walk well through life.

There will be judgement but not before we are given ample opportunity to receive his grace.

Jesus. We're called to take on the family likeness and join in the family business. This may mean standing up to our own prejudices first, and then standing up to the prejudices of others – confronting the bullies, and/or supporting the downtrodden, the judged and marginalised.

We have all sinned and we all need Jesus' mercy – most people today will not see Jesus, except through us. Are we able to live as merciful people, receiving God's mercy for ourselves and offering this same mercy to others? Will we trust any judgment to God – such as we ourselves hope to receive from God – as Jesus said, 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.' (Matthew 7:12)

'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone...'

Prayers: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:4-6)

- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, for neighbours, for family and friends.
- Pray for the Church.



Collect: 7th after Trinity: Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**



The Lord's Prayer: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, COGS, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding ticketed and socially distanced services in the building on Sundays at 9.30am. Further information on our website or by ringing our vicar, Howard.

If you know of others who would like to receive this, or you would rather not receive it; or if you find yourself isolated and not able to get neighbours, friends, or family to help, then ring Howard, 01420 563344.

