

## ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 13/09/20

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### Opening affirmation from Psalm 103 <sup>1</sup>

Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.  
Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me.  
He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.  
He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies.  
He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's!  
The Lord gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly.  
He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel.  
The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

### HYMN – SF 466

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|---|--|
| 1. Praise my soul the King of heaven<br>To His feet thy tribute bring.<br>Ransomed, healed, restore, forgiven,<br>Who like me His praise should sing?<br>Praise Him! Praise Him!<br>Praise Him! Praise Him!<br>Praise the everlasting King. | 3. Father-like He tends and spares us,<br>Well our feeble frame He knows;<br>In his hands He gently bears us,<br>Rescues us from all our foes:<br>Praise Him! Praise Him!<br>Praise Him! Praise Him!<br>Widely as His mercy flows. |
| 2. Praise Him for His grace and favour<br>To our fathers in distress;<br>Praise Him, still the same forever,<br>Slow to chide, and swift to bless.<br>Praise Him! Praise Him!<br>Praise Him! Praise Him!<br>Glorious in His faithfulness.   | 4. Angels help us to adore Him;<br>Ye behold Him face to face.<br>Sun and moon bow down before Him,<br>Dwellers all in time and space.<br>Praise Him! Praise Him!<br>Praise Him! Praise Him!<br>Praise with us the God of grace.   |

Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)

### Prayer of praise

Holy God, loving Father, King of Heaven we join with the angels and with the whole of creation in praising you. We praise You for who You are, faithful, good and true. We rejoice in Your loving kindness, mercy and forgiveness. There is no one like You, no other deserving of adoration like You, O God.

Loving Father, the one who sees and knows us – we praise You knowing we are made in Your likeness, saved and redeemed in Jesus and cleansed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. All honour and glory be to You now and forever. Amen.

### Prayer of Confession

Forgiving God, more willing to forgive than often we are to confess,  
help us to see our failings, to see where we fall short,  
to see where we deceive ourselves,  
where we close our eyes and ears to the wrongs in our lives.  
May we be more aware of the reality of our actions,  
the need to change, the depth of our unworthiness.

We come before you, seeking forgiveness.

*Silence*

Now let us receive your forgiveness, that we may forgive as you have forgiven us. **Amen.**

### **Reading – Matthew 18: 21-35 <sup>2</sup>**

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’ <sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’

<sup>23</sup> ‘Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.’

<sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. <sup>26</sup> ‘At this the servant fell on his knees before him. “Be patient with me,” he begged, “and I will pay back everything.” <sup>27</sup> The servant’s master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. <sup>28</sup> ‘But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. “Pay back what you owe me!” he demanded.

<sup>29</sup> ‘His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, “Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.”

<sup>30</sup> ‘But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Then the master called the servant in. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” <sup>34</sup> In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. <sup>35</sup> ‘This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’

### **Talk part 1**

I have recently watched the film *Invictus* about events surrounding the South African Rugby World Cup victory in 1995 which happened just a year after Nelson Mandela was elected President. If you haven’t seen it, it can still be seen on BBC iPlayer for a few weeks. It is, at its heart, a story of reconciliation and forgiveness across the racial divide. It is full of courageous and insightful actions that turned enemies into friends. Two great actors portray the main characters Nelson Mandela and Francois Pienaar (the SA rugby captain). Of course it is a film and real life was doubtless more nuanced but Nelson Mandela’s attitudes and achievements are well attested. It is astonishing to me that a man could be transformed by 27 years in a brutal South African jail into such a compassionate and wise leader of his nation at a critical time in its history. Underlying that transformation is the ability to forgive.

Mandela is quoted as saying ‘when a deep injury is done to us we never heal until we forgive’. His experience only serves to add weight to that observation. The Bible would lead us to the same conclusion as we have heard today where once again we are invited to learn from, or with, straightforward, no nonsense, in-with-both-feet Peter. We heard it in Jesus’ answer to Peter’s rhetorical question ‘if my brother or sister sins against me how many times should I forgive him?’ - ‘not 7 times but I say 77 times’ or more probably 70 x 7 times and that doesn’t mean 490 times and you can stop, it means there is no limit.

As so often to demonstrate this truth Jesus tells the parable story we heard. It is a story full of hyperbole, of exaggeration for effect. It is a cartoon. The amounts of money involved here show us that. There is a servant who owns 10,000 talents or bags of gold, several billion pounds based on the price of gold today! This is the unpayable debt and that is the point. The debt was so great that he was to be sold into bondage. He was no longer free. The consequence of his unpaid debt was loss of freedom, to become beholden to, enslaved by an owner.

Remember Peter is asking about the forgiveness of sins here. Sin holds us in bondage, it takes away our freedom, makes us captive, and unable to decide for ourselves, unable to escape the demands of our owner. We are powerless to free ourselves from it by our own efforts. It creates an unpayable debt. What we need to happen is what happened to the servant, we need someone else to pay the debt, someone who has infinite resources. No earthly king would have enough to pay this man's monetary debt, so no earthly king has the means to pay the debt that our sins have caused. Only Jesus, the King of Heaven can pay the unpayable debt. The king in the story cancelled the debt or forgave him the debt, once and for all, finished and done with. Just for the asking, the pleading, the falling down and worshipping.

Think again about the wonder of this gift as we hear and join in with this song that celebrates the depth of God's love in making forgiveness possible for us all.

### **Hymn - SF 780 <sup>3</sup>**

How deep the Father's love for us,  
How vast beyond all measure,  
That He should give His only Son  
To make a wretch His treasure.  
How great the pain of searing loss –  
The father turns His face away,  
As wounds which mar the chosen one  
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,  
My sin upon His shoulders;  
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers.  
It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished;  
His dying breath has brought me life –  
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,  
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;  
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,  
His death and resurrection.  
Why should I gain from His reward?  
I cannot give an answer,  
But this I know with all my heart,  
His wounds have paid my ransom.

## Talk part 2

But this is far from all, for in the second part of the story the consequences of setting a limit on forgiveness become starkly clear. The forgiven servant, who had the unpayable debt paid by the king with the unimaginable resources now showed his response to such generosity and love, how he exercised his new found freedom. He turned upon a fellow servant who owed a pittance in comparison, 100 denarii, one six hundred thousandth of the debt he had just been forgiven, seized him by the throat, 'pay me back what you owe!' There is no mercy, no forgiveness. A paltry sum, quite payable given time and understanding, a mere trifle, and that is the point.

When we consider our attitude to those around us who have offended against us, who have done us wrong, who have sinned against us no matter how great the wrong, how significant the offence, we are to look at it in comparison to the unpayable debt that God has paid for us.

Forgiven sinners must be forgivers. Forgiveness has to be passed on as CS Lewis said, 'to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you'. There is to be no counting up, not 7 times or 77 times or 490 times, we have no option, the alternative is bondage, the loss of freedom as the forgiven servant who failed to forgive in the story discovered. He put himself back in prison, in torture and agony he was like all who fail to forgive, tortured by the torturers of anger and bitterness that eat you up from inside, the torturers of malice, that make you lie awake at night stewing over every offence and how you can get even, the torturers of an unforgiving heart who stalk you by day and night and never leave your side - who will suck the joy out of your life. Some are sick because they have unforgiveness in their hearts. Many testify to the healing effects of coming to a place of forgiveness. Repentance and forgiveness are two of the most powerful tools in the healing ministry.

Yet too often we do not know what forgiveness is. Think about the South African experience again and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission chaired by Desmond Tutu. Forgiveness is not saying what happened didn't happen or doesn't matter or that you were not hurt quite the opposite the truth needs to be acknowledged. However in the end forgiveness is a decision. It is an act of will. You do not need to have been offered forgiveness or feel like forgiving, it is a decision to let go of the pain of the injury and to release that to God who alone is just and merciful. It is not letting the person that hurt or wronged you off the hook; it is 'taking them off your hook' and 'putting them on God's' in the assurance that what then happens is between them. God will deal with it.

We live in constant need of forgiveness so we need to offer it and share it or else it won't be available for us to receive when we need it. Those who need forgiveness need to forgive – it is a virtuous circle – providing we have the courage to join the circle. Here is a monologue to consider.

### **Meditation to read aloud and to think about**

Lord, you can't be serious!  
Seventy times seven!  
What about 'enough's enough'?  
'Mess up once more and you're out!'

Seventy times seven!  
Lord, what is it with you?  
Is there no limit – where is the justice in this?

Seventy times seven!  
Lord, are you saying  
we need to look at this the other way round?  
instead of counting other's out,  
we've got to count the ways we have been counted in –  
Seventy times seven!

How many times can I count  
when I've left it up to you  
to renew, restore,  
revive, reconcile or redeem me?  
How many times when you might have said,  
'You can't be serious!  
You've messed up for the last time! You're out!'  
But I have received your forgiveness again.

How many times have I have come back to you like the prodigal  
Broken, ragged, empty and smelling of pigs  
And you have said, "this is my child who was lost and is found  
come let us celebrate".

Seventy times seven Lord!  
Come to think about it, are you sure that's enough?

### **Suggestions for your own prayers**

Pray for

- Schools, teachers, support staff, governors and school leaders on this Education Sunday.
- Pupils and parents adjusting to new restrictions anxious about the uncertainties ahead.
- Higher education lecturers and staff, young people preparing to begin courses and those returning; those who will continue to learn remotely and those who will be moving away from home.
- Health officials, local authority staff and all involved in testing, track and trace as cases rise and as local restrictions are re-imposed.
- For those caught up in violence on our city streets this week. For those injured and bereaved. For police working to ensure public safety and to bring criminals to justice.
- For forgotten places in the world hidden by our focus on coronavirus where war, disease and poverty – for Yemen, Syria and Libya – for Rohingya and Uyghur people displaced and persecuted.
- For those known to us having operations and treatment this week; those in hospital or unwell.
- For ourselves - ask God for what you need today.

### **Lord's Prayer**

## **HYMN - STF 338 <sup>4</sup>**

There is a Redeemer,  
Jesus, God's own Son,  
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One.

*Thank You, O my Father,  
For giving us Your Son,  
And leaving Your Spirit—  
Till the work on earth is done.*

Jesus my Redeemer,  
Name above all names,  
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,  
O for sinners slain.

*Thank You, O my Father,*

When I stand in glory  
I will see His face,  
And there I'll serve my King forever  
In that holy place.

*Thank You, O my Father,*

## **Final Blessing**

As this service ends life and worship continue. As God has been present in these moments of praise and reflection so he promises to be present with us always. May you have the certain knowledge of the blessing of God the Father, the peace of Jesus, God the Son and the comfort of God the Holy Spirit ever with you. Amen

## **Acknowledgements**

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