

This short act of worship has been produced for you by
Revd Kathleen Richardson.

If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few
moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would
normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as
they pray for you.

We start the service today by saying 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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

This service is set in the context of what God does for us, and
what he asks from us.

Hymn: What Shall I do My God to Love (Singing the Faith 436)

Charles Wesley's hymn about the immense love of God

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here
www.youtube.com/

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTM3Ocp5V00>

What shall I do my God to love,
my loving God to praise?
The length, and breadth, and height to prove,
and depth of sovereign grace.

Your sovereign love to all extends,
immense and unconfined;
from age to age it never ends;
enfolds all humankind.

Throughout the world its breadth is known,
wide as infinity;
so wide it never passed by one,
or it had passed by me.

My trespass was grown up to heaven;
but, far above the skies,
in Christ abundantly forgiven,
I see your mercies rise.

The depth of all redeeming love
what angel tongue can tell?
O may I to the utmost prove
the gift unspeakable.

Come quickly, gracious Lord, and take
possession of your own;
my longing heart vouchsafe to make
your everlasting throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayer

Generous God, you draw us into the outpouring of your love,
that embraces all creation.
Your power is infinite and your grace unbounded, your mercy
is limitless and your love unending.
Your realm knows nothing of the borders we create between
peoples and nations. You have taught us that everyone is
created in your image and is our neighbour.

Loving Jesus, in your teaching, remembered and recorded by
your disciples we hear your voice calling us to follow you,
challenging our conceptions of duty and reward, inviting us to
trust you with our lives. You have commanded us to love,

without thought of our security or glory or gain.

And in your death and resurrection you open for us life in all its
fullness.

Holy Spirit, you offer yourself as help and guide, support and
comfort. Your power invades our weaknesses and enables our
service.

Eternal God, receive our praise and thanksgiving, strengthen us
in faith and renew our determination to live in the light of your
love. **Amen**

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures – Genesis 50:15-21

(Joseph had been sold by his brothers as a slave to traders
going to Egypt. He rose in Pharaoh's household to have great
power and responsibility. His father and brothers were forced
out of Israel by famine and Joseph gave them sanctuary in
Egypt. Then his father died and his brothers were afraid
again.)

Realising that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said,
"What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back
in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So they
approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction
before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of

your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.’ Now, therefore, please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.”

Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, “We are here as your slaves.” But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.”

In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came to Jesus and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times.

For this reason, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 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.

So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

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.’

Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’

But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.

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.

Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.

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

I confess to a new sort of guilty pleasure.

During the long days of isolation when I was watching more television than usual, I came across a programme called 'Can't pay, we'll take it away'. It is a reality television programme that centres round high court enforcement agents trying to recover debts on behalf of claimants. Some of these are fairly trivial, others massive debts sometimes accrued from not having paid rent to a landlord for months. If the debtor will not or cannot pay the agents have the power to take away their goods to sell. We watch as arrogant debtors use devious means to try to avoid payments, or as tearful and ashamed people ask friends and neighbours for help. All true stories of the awful dilemma of indebtedness. It sometimes makes me cry.

The story Jesus told about indebtedness as Matthew records it has an element of unreality about it. A slave owes his master, the King, an enormous amount of money. We are not told the reason for this debt and the amount of it is unbelievable. He owes ten thousand talents. If I say that the total tribute the area of Galilee had to pay to Rome each year was 200 talents, and it would take a labourer fifteen years to earn one talent –

you begin to see the magnitude of his indebtedness. The debt is unpayable and the situation has gone far beyond recovery.

He pleads for time to pay but the King, out of pity, releases him from the entire debt. As he leaves the presence of the King he meets a fellow slave who owes him a hundred denarii, one six-hundredth of his own debt but still the equivalent of 15 day's wages for a slave labourer, and he insists on the debt being paid, having the man thrown into prison when he could not pay it.

But this is the King's household, his community. His fellow slaves can't let this go and the King is told. The huge debt is reinstated and the unforgiving slave's punishment is made eternal.

But then Jesus goes on to say 'My heavenly Father will do this to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.' – it is not about indebtedness, but about forgiveness. And this is where the passage started, with Peter asking, 'how often should I forgive someone who sins against me?'

It is not about the extent of the sin, nor the frequency of the sinning, but the willingness to follow the example of the King

and be ready to forgive.

So, says verse 35, we shall not enjoy the forgiveness of God for ourselves unless we offer forgiveness to others. Jesus is not talking about justice but about mercy. Mercy is in the heart of God and to forgive is to be God-like. As Jesus taught his disciples the way to pray, the only clause in it that is conditional is this, 'Forgive our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us'.

Jesus is talking about our community life. Are there things within our community that we can't forgive? What right have we to forgive someone if they betrayed our trust and stole the church's money, or, worse, abused children in our church family? Even then, the church has developed its grievance procedures to have within them the possibility of grace and restoration. It is our duty to report these things, but it is necessary, for our own wellbeing, to keep compassion in our hearts.

In the reading from Genesis we hear, 'You intended to do harm, but God meant it for good'.

A little while ago I heard a news account of the trial of the man

who massacred many people in the Mosque in New Zealand. One after another, relatives of those who had died spoke of the pain of their loss and their hatred for the killer, who listened impassively. Then one woman whose son had died simply said 'I forgive you', and the guards reported that a tremor ran through the prisoner's body.

A moment of quiet.

Prayer

Confession (*adapted from material by Julie Hulme*)

Loving King, we bring our debts to you,
and pray that you will answer us with forgiveness.
You have given us treasures of love and peace,
opportunity and joy, knowledge and honesty.
But we have been poor stewards of your gifts,
and have not loved them, nor used them, as we ought.
So now we bring debts of selfishness,
of greed and thoughtlessness, prejudice and obstinacy,
pride and deceit.

We come before you and we seek your love, peace and joy,
knowledge, honesty and compassion.
God of grace, forgive us our debts
as we forgive others who owe debts to us.

Assurance of forgiveness

God is love.

Through Jesus our sins are forgiven.

Let us live in the power of the Spirit. **Amen.**

Intercession

We call to mind those who may have reasons to resent us,
those we have hurt by design or carelessness;

We pray for those whose needs we have not met,
whose pain we have not felt, whose sadness we have not
comforted.

We bring before you those who will not pray for themselves,
who feel their sins are too great for forgiveness
or who have never heard the gospel of love.

We pray for all who feel overburdened by debts they cannot
pay, those whose livelihood and mental and physical health
have been damaged by sickness.

Loving God, you bear all things and carried our sin to the Cross.
Your love never ends.

May your church be a community of reconciliation and
reassurance.

Through the power of your forgiving spirit, bring to an end all
evil in us;

make us good for each other and sources of healing and joy.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer. Amen

Hymn: Ten thousand reasons

*(Song by Matt Redman that reflects the ten thousand talents of
the debt owed)*

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

www.youtube.com/

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXDGE_IRIOE

Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul

Worship his holy name.

Sing like never before, O my soul

I'll worship your holy name.

The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning.

It's time to sing your song again;

Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me,

Let me be singing when the evening comes.

Bless the Lord ...

You're rich in love and you're slow to anger
Your name is great and your heart is kind.
For all your goodness I will keep on singing
Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.
Bless the Lord ...

And on that day when my strength is failing,
The end draws near and my time has come,
Still my soul will sing your praise unending
Ten thousand years and then evermore.
Bless the Lord

Matt Redman (b. 1974)

BLESSING

Hear again the words of Jesus, 'Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace'.