



# WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



*THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST*

**13<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020**

**TRINITY 14**

<p><u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u></p> <p>Genesis 50 v 15 - 21</p> <p>Romans 14 v 1 - 12</p> <p>Matthew 18 v 21 - 35</p>	<p>PARISH OFFICE: Monday &amp; Friday 9 – 30 am to 11 – 30 am          TEL:01252 331161: e- mail: <a href="mailto:office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk">office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a>          BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS &amp; BAPTISMS – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161          WEBSITE: <a href="http://www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk">www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a></p>
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## CARE AND SHARE

Our initiative to help those who may be short on food supplies in the current crisis. Food is being left outside church for people to take for themselves, or to share with others who they know are in need. It is clearly being appreciated, as the shelves are usually emptied each day.

If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. please bring it to church with you or leave it on the doorstep of the Rectory. Thank you.

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### COLLECT FOR – TRINITY 14

Almighty God,  
whose only Son has opened for us  
a new and living way into your presence:  
give us pure hearts and steadfast wills  
to worship you in spirit and in truth;  
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.

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## CHURCH SERVICES

There are two services of Holy Communion once again, every Sunday. An 8 am Holy Communion in St Peter's Centre, and a 10 am Family Communion in church.

We are unable to have both services in the same building at present, due to issues relating to the cleaning that would be necessary between the services.

(The usual second Sunday pattern of Morning Worship at 10 am followed by Parish Communion at 11 – 15 am will NOT be happening at present for the same reasons.)

On Wednesdays there is a service of Holy Communion at 9 – 30 am in church. Unfortunately, there can be no coffee and chat after this service for the time being.

Social distancing and Public Health requirements will be met. Please see our website for details.

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### READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – TRINITY 15

Jonah 3 v 10 to end of 4; Philippians 1 v 21 - end;  
Matthew 20 v 1 - 16

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### PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY:

IRIS DAY; DAPHNE SHENTON

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### DON'T FORGET OUR ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like emergency prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 – this is a confidential service.

PCC MEETING – the next meeting (online) is on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September at 7 – 30 pm.

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### ANNUAL CHURCH MEETING

This meeting, postponed from April, will now be on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October in church. We will be having a shorter service of Family Communion at 10 am and the meeting will follow immediately after. We hope to be finished by 11 – 15 am. More details to follow, with nomination forms for PCC members and for one churchwarden, as Charles will be standing down.

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### HARVEST CELEBRATION

On Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September. Donations of tins, packets etc will be welcomed. They will be used for our Care and Share outside church. Any fresh produce will be sold and the proceeds sent to Step by Step.

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## Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

*If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.*

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

All: May Christ, the true, the only light  
banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.

O come, let us sing to the Lord; ♦  
let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation.  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving ♦  
and be glad in him with psalms.  
For the Lord is a great God ♦  
and a great king above all gods.  
Come, let us worship and bow down ♦  
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.  
For he is our God; ♦  
we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his  
hand.

All: Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All: May Christ, the true, the only light  
banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.

*This hymn is said or sung:*

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,  
Christ, the true, the only light,  
Sun of righteousness, arise,  
triumph o'er the shades of night;  
Dayspring from on high, be near;  
Daystar, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn  
unaccompanied by thee:  
joyless is the day's return,  
till thy mercy's beams I see,  
till they inward light impart,  
glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine;  
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;  
fill me, radiance divine;  
scatter all my unbelief;  
more and more thyself display  
Shining to the perfect day.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before  
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,  
so may the light of your presence, O God,  
set our hearts on fire with love for you;  
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) Come, Holy Spirit of God,  
All: and search our hearts with the light of Christ.

(L) Our Lord Jesus Christ said:  
The first commandment is this:  
'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.  
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul, with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.'

The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'  
There is no other commandment greater than these.  
On these two commandments hang all the law and the  
prophets.

All: Amen. Lord, have mercy.

*After a period of reflection*

(L) Come, let us return to the Lord and say:

All: Lord our God,  
in our sin we have avoided your call.  
Our love for you is like a morning cloud,  
like the dew that goes away early.  
Have mercy on us;  
deliver us from judgement;  
bind up our wounds and revive us;  
in Jesus Christ our Lord;  
bring us His pardon and peace, we pray,  
now and for ever. Amen.

*All say The Gloria:*

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world:  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

*We now say the collect for Trinity 14 (see first page):*

*Read Genesis 50 v 15 – 21 followed by Psalm 103 v 1 – 13  
concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as  
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

*Read Romans 14 v 1 - 12*

(L) Alleluia, alleluia.  
Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.  
You have the words of eternal life.

All: Alleluia.

*Now read Matthew 18 v 21 – 35 Here are some thoughts on  
today's readings from Fr Keith:*

I'm sure that most people would agree that forgiveness is a  
good thing, at least as an abstract concept. We all know  
that not forgiving someone, when they have hurt us, in the  
end often ends up causing us even more hurt. There is a  
continuing tension in our relationship with them, we can't  
get the wrong that has been done out of our mind, our  
whole life seems to be getting more and more poisoned.  
We lose sleep and can't concentrate properly on other  
things. Moreover, in the context of the community in which  
we live, it begins to affect other people too, those who  
weren't directly involved with the initial situation.

So, Peter's question to Jesus about how many times he  
should forgive another member of the church, who sins

against him, is very pertinent to us all today, no less than when it was asked 2000 years ago. It follows on from Jesus' sayings in the gospel we heard last week. Then, Carol spoke about Jesus urging us to sort problems out directly with the person concerned, rather than going around moaning to other people about them and upsetting the whole community. She went on to say that Jesus' language was all about reconciliation, and that is also true in this morning's gospel, in Jesus' answer to Peter.

I expect Peter was more than a little surprised, though, by the lavishness of Jesus' instruction, as perhaps, we are. Jesus tells Peter to forgive the sinner, not seven times, but seventy-seven times – in other words, not to keep count but to just go on forgiving. In the Church that Jesus is establishing, we are to understand that there is to be no place for ongoing 'bad blood' between Christians, no place for feuding that goes on for years, no place for the fragmentation that can so easily follow when sinners remain unforgiven, when people never move on but remain stuck in the bad moment for ever.

So far, so good? Again, as an abstract concept, I would guess that most Christians would agree. But, can we stick to that opinion when it is us, personally, who have been upset and sinned against? If you're like me, that's a lot more difficult. Even if we would *like* to forgive, we may question the sincerity of the one in need of forgiveness. Also, lurking in our mind, is probably the notion that they need, at least to be punished, to suffer a bit themselves just as they have made us suffer. Otherwise, we tell ourselves, it just isn't fair. Moreover, if they have the gall to repeat the offence, or do something else to hurt us, well, surely, it's inhuman to expect us to keep on forgiving them and letting them have yet another chance? Such is how the human mind usually works. When we think like that, though, we need to read the story that follows on immediately after Jesus' instruction to forgive again and again.

Out of pity, a King let's a slave off a huge debt when he pleads for more time to pay. That same slave, though, goes and behaves without pity to a fellow slave in relation to a much smaller debt. Whistle-blowers tell the King about this obvious injustice and double standard, and the King in his anger has the first slave handed over to the torturers until he can pay every penny that the King is owed. Fair enough, we might say, he deserves all that he gets, *but*, are we as happy to accept the words of Jesus *at the end* of this tale, when he says to us: 'So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart'.

Now those words should certainly make us all pause and look at our own record of forgiving others. It echoes the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus tells us to pray 'forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us'. We simply cannot expect God to forgive us, if we aren't willing to forgive our brothers and sisters – there are no ifs or buts about this, but it's certainly not easy! It's yet another example of how following Jesus requires us to go against some of, what seems to us, to be our natural instincts, and maybe even common sense. But, then, we also need to remember the story at the start of Genesis, where we are reminded that, from the very beginning, as a human race, we have all sinned. 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us' as St John tells us.

As always, we need to look to Jesus as our example of putting this hard saying into practice. From the cross He cries out in pain, regarding his executioners, 'Father forgive them'. That shows us that he means what he said, and expects us to do the same even when it's hard.

In the Old Testament reading today, Joseph gives us another example of forgiveness in practice. He speaks kindly to his brothers who had tried to kill him, and they and their families are helped in their time of great need. Joseph realises that, even out of the wrong that they did to him, God has been able to turn the situation around for good. By not letting the situation turn into a long running feud, the Jewish people are rescued from the famine that could have wiped them out, and so are able to carry on being the nation that God had called them to be. Joseph also recognises that he is not God. It is only God who ultimately sits in judgement, and it is not our place to try to usurp his authority and so make matters worse.

Now, of course, we should all be working for justice and helping people turn away from sin, but we must never forget that we too are sinners. And, just in case we are tempted to start trying to justify lack of forgiveness on the grounds that some sins are worse than others, it's worth noting that Jesus doesn't talk about degrees of sin here either. *All* sin is repugnant to God and it isn't up to us to try to get ourselves off the hook in the way that the Pharisees often did by nit-picking. We shouldn't try to create a league table of offences to suit our own purposes to excuse ourselves from being unforgiving in certain circumstances. That's the kind of behaviour that Jesus argued with the Pharisees about.

God's world would be a much better place without grudges, feuds and malicious talk, and we all know that. So, let's listen to Jesus, and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, try to get better at forgiving others and spreading peace and harmony, next time we suffer because of what someone has said or done to us. All the time remembering our own sinfulness and our need to ask our Father for forgiveness for what we have done, and for what we ought to have done, but haven't. Amen

*Now pause for your own reflections, and then we say the Apostles' Creed:*

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*We now say together:*

*All* Give your people knowledge of salvation, O God,  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦  
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦  
born of the house of his servant David.

- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦  
to save us from our enemies,  
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦  
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham  
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦  
holy and righteous in his sight  
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the  
Most High, ♦  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the  
shadow of death, ♦  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

*All* Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

*All* Give your people knowledge of salvation, O God,  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.

*Our prayers, today, are written by Sheila Taylor:*

Everlasting and Creator God, Lord of compassion and understanding, we come with an open heart to express our concerns for the Church and for the world, and we thank you, for your unfailing goodness.

Creator God, we pray for our Bishops, Andrew and Jo, for our clergy, Father Keith and Rev Carol, that they will continue, in these difficult times of Covid, to minister, encourage and show us the way you wish us to take so that we have a hope of life eternal with You.

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Creator God, we pray for our world, where through media coverage we see the misery and tragedy brought about by wrong choices, We pray for wisdom and compassion in all negotiations and decisions taken by our world and local leaders. We particularly pray that these decisions and negotiations will give priority to all things associated with the Pandemic.

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Creator God, help and guide our schools, colleges and universities as they return for a new educational year, especially with all their concerns about the Coronavirus and how they will cope with social distancing but still be with one another and learn with and from one another. May their teachers inspire a love of learning for its own sake and kindle joy in all subjects and sports and help them to grow into caring and knowledgeable adults.

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Creator God, we raise before you those from our community who are ill, hospitalised or recuperating and for

those we know within our families and circle of friends. In a moment of silence we name.....

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Creator God, give us ears to hear and minds to understand the message of the Good News brought to us by Your Son, Jesus Christ. We ask your forgiveness when we fail You, and we pray that we in turn will forgive our friends when they do not always do as we would wish.

We pray for Rebecca Collman being baptised today, for her parents Elizabeth and Richard, her God parents and family. We also pray for Charlotte and Lewis who are to be married at St Peter's next Saturday. Both are starting on a new journey, we ask you blessings on them to guide them always.

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Creator Lord, we especially pray for any we know who have recently died and for those whose anniversary of death fall at this time. We pray for them and their families at this sad time. We remember:

Iris Day: Daphne Shenton

Lord in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Merciful Father: accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

Thy kingdom come, O God,  
Thy rule, O Christ, begin;  
Break with thy iron rod  
The tyrannies of sin.

Where is thy reign of peace  
And purity and love?  
When shall all hatred cease,  
As in the realms above?

When comes the promised time  
That war shall be no more,  
And lust, oppression, crime,  
Shall flee thy face before?

We pray thee Lord, arise,  
And come in thy great might;  
Revive our longing eyes,  
Which languish for thy sight.

O'er lands both near and far  
Thick darkness broodeth yet:  
Arise, O morning Star,  
Arise, and never set.

*Let us pray:*

(L) Merciful God, your Son came to save us and bore our sins on the cross: may we trust in your mercy and know your love, rejoicing in the righteousness that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*All:* In darkness and in light, in trouble and in joy, help us, heavenly Father, to trust your love, to serve your purpose, and to praise your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*All:* May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us, and all who we love, today and always. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory. Amen.

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### Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,  
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.  
O Lord, make haste to help us.

*A lamp or candle may be lit.*

The Lord is my light and my salvation:  
my God shall make my darkness to be bright.

Blessed are you, Lord God, creator of day and night:  
to you be praise and glory for ever.  
As darkness falls you renew your promise  
to reveal among us the light of your presence.  
By the light of Christ, your living Word,  
dispel the darkness of our hearts  
that we may walk as children of light  
and sing your praise throughout the world.  
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:  
Blessed be God for ever.

*A Song of the Light is said:*

Hail, gladdening Light, of his pure glory poured  
who is the immortal Father, heavenly, blest,  
holiest of holies, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now we are come to the sun's hour of rest,  
the lights of evening round us shine,  
we hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine.

Worthiest art thou at all times to be sung  
with undefiled tongue,  
Son of our God, giver of life, alone:  
therefore in all the world thy glories, Lord, they own.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,  
we pray with one heart and mind:

*Silence is kept.*

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,  
so may your mercy come down upon us  
to cleanse our hearts  
and set us free to sing your praise  
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 110; Tue 9; Wed 11; Thurs 18;  
Fri 22; Sat 24, ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.  
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between  
the two readings we say:*

*All* Our hope is not in vain,  
because God's love has been poured into our  
hearts.

1 God reckons as righteous those who believe, ♦  
who believe in him who raised Jesus from the dead;

2 For Christ was handed over to death for our sins, ♦  
and raised to life for our justification.  
3 Since we are justified by faith, ♦ we have peace with  
God through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
4 Through Christ we have gained access  
to the grace in which we stand, ♦  
and rejoice in our hope of the glory of God.

5 We even exult in our sufferings, ♦  
for suffering produces endurance,  
6 And endurance brings hope, ♦  
and our hope is not in vain,  
7 Because God's love has been poured  
into our hearts, ♦  
through the Holy Spirit, given to us.  
8 God proves his love for us: ♦  
while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.  
9 Since we have been justified by his death, ♦  
how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath.  
10 Therefore, we exult in God through  
our Lord Jesus Christ, ♦  
in whom we have now received our reconciliation.

*All* Glory to the Father, and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

*All* Our hope is not in vain, because God's love has  
been poured into our hearts.

*Readings:*

Monday: Isaiah 63 v 1 - 16; 1 Corinthians 1 v 18 - 25  
Tuesday: 1 Chronicles 13; Mark 10 v 1 - 16  
Wednesday: 1 Chron. 15 v 1 to 16 v 3; Mark 10 v 17 - 31  
Thursday: 1 Chronicles 17; Mark 10 v 32 - 34  
Friday: 1 Chronicles 21 v 1 to 22 v 1; Mark 10 v 35 - 45  
Saturday: 1 Chronicles 22 v 2 - end; Mark 10 v 46 - end

*Gospel Cantic: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)*

*All* You have scattered the proud in their conceit,  
and lifted up the lowly.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit  
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on  
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the  
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his  
name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation  
to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered  
the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting  
up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the  
rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to  
remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and  
his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.  
Amen.

All You have scattered the proud in their conceit,  
and lifted up the lowly.

*Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.*

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for this week (see first page)

O God,  
the source of all good desires,  
all right judgements, and all just works:  
give to your servants that peace  
which the world cannot give;  
that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments,  
and that, freed from the fear of our enemies,  
we may pass our time in rest and quietness;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*This hymn may be said or sung to the tune  
'All through the night'*

God, that madest earth and heaven,  
darkness and light;  
who the day for toil hast given,  
for rest the night;  
may thine angel guards defend us,  
slumber sweet thy mercy send us;  
holy dreams and hopes attend us,  
all through the night.

Guard us waking, guard us sleeping,  
and when we die,  
may we in thy mighty keeping  
all peaceful lie;  
when the last dread call shall wake us,  
do not thou, our God, forsake us,  
but to reign in glory take us  
with Thee on high.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great  
mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night,  
for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all  
evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the  
mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

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## Bishop's Sermon

# Mathematics of Forgiveness?

Sermon from Bishop Jo for Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020

*Matthew 18:21-35*

"How often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" asks Peter, raising himself up and stretching himself out to be magnanimous, far beyond his natural human capacity. Because this far exceeded what the rabbis taught about forgiving someone three times (after which you could do with them what

you liked). He'd DOUBLED it and added one more time for good measure.

Jesus answered Peter, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

At this point I picture Peter trying to do some quick

sums in his head, getting out his mental calculator so to speak. And Jesus smiling, given his whole point is that forgiveness cannot be a quantifiable event. It's a quality; a way of living, a way of being. It asks everything and exceeds everything. It's the impossibility, that Jesus makes possible.

I wonder if you've ever felt you stood in that impossible place: at the intersection bearing some tremendous hurt yet also aware of Jesus' call to forgive. It can feel like a double whammy, can't it? Not only broken by wounds from another's action but also tortured by the expectation you just can't manage.

As CS Lewis puts it, 'everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until there is something to forgive'. (*Mere Christianity*, p.115). Forgiveness is the virtue we most enjoy yet least employ.

What do we do when there is something to forgive?

We may strike back, seeking revenge. We may get paralysed by the darkness and get depressed. We might run away and find tremendous energy for something wholly other. We may build barriers of resentment and resistance. I speak from experience. I myself have been in that place where forgiveness felt preposterous: utterly impossible. An occasion comes to mind when I found myself quite unable to complete the Lord's Prayer as I stumbled across that line as if for the first time ever, 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us'. It was devastating. Quite apart from the fact that I wasn't in a position to continue leading worship as I quietly dissolved into a puddle of tears.

Today's parable describes vividly how God's forgiveness and human forgiveness are integrally related. The king forgives his slave an extraordinary amount. Ten thousand talents is about 3000 years of work at the ordinary daily wage. It seems there is no debt too large to be forgiven. This man, this debtor, was forgiven. That's what the kingdom of heaven is like. That's how our God is. This slave, however, refused to forgive his fellow slave 100 denarii, about three months of work at the ordinary daily wage. Too often that's what our world is like. Frequently, it's how we are. And in that refusal, the forgiven slave lost his own forgiveness.

For me it was uttering a line of the Lord's Prayer that I'd trotted out most days of my life as if it were brand new that delivered the realisation that freedom from my bad is tied to the evil of another. No matter how unbalanced the equation, both parties are left bereft of the future God wants to give. There's the parable in a nutshell. I recall someone who worked in reconciliation following the Rwandan genocide

telling how she used to illustrate this in her workshops. She asked for two volunteers to be tied up at opposite ends of a length of rope, which was looped around a tree. Until there was forgiveness between them, both parties were constantly constrained by the others movements. Neither party was free.

The demand for forgiveness includes the racist, the rapist, the bully. It includes the cheating spouse, the lying journalist, the abusive parent. It extends to the corrupt regime, the greedy corporation, a tribal genocide. Nothing and no one is exempt from forgiveness if I am not to be exempt.

Forgiveness is the only way forward. That doesn't mean we forget, condone, or approve of what was done. It doesn't mean we ignore or excuse cruelty or injustice. It means we're released from them. We let go of the longings for destruction or the fantasies of revenge. We halt the acid of resentment that otherwise seeps into everything. We look to the future rather than the past. We try to see and love as God sees and loves. We pray for the other's wellbeing, entrusting their judgement to the One who is the ultimate judge. And we name our own sinfulness and failure as well as our pain.

Forgiveness is the way in which we align our life with God's life. We have to desist continually from putting ourselves in the place of God, as if we know better about justice than the One to whom everyone is accountable (Ro. 14:10, 12). I think regular prayer – including regular confession of our own sin – is the best cure for that. And in my experience, when we pray for those who've hurt us, we're enabled to grow in our capacity for forgiveness, to be stretched like Peter into the possibility of ever greater magnanimity. I've found it helpful to read the accounts of others seeking to forgive, or be forgiven. Nelson Mandela. Desmond Tutu. John Newton. Festo Kivengere. Just to name a few. They help to put my story, my little corner of this broken world, in wider perspective.

There is nothing like forgiveness. It's intoxicating in the freedom it brings – and not just when we receive it but when we find a way to give it. We need to forgive as much, maybe more, for ourselves as for the one we forgive. Forgiving those who trespass against us is the salve that begins to heal our wounds. It may not change the one who hurt me but I know it changes me. It brings deeper life, greater grace, richer peace – and strangely, greater capacity for further forgiveness.

Forgiveness creates the space for new life. It looses us from the weight of chains. It disentangles us from the evil of another. It's the refusal to let our future be determined by the past. It's the letting go of the thoughts, the hatred, the fear that fill us so that we might live and love again. It's the healing of our soul and life. Forgiveness takes us out of darkness into light, from death to life - it's the determined choice of resurrection for the one who forgives.

But how do we begin to forgive? It's no easy road. Don't let anyone tell you, "Just give it up to God. Forgive and forget." Simplistic answers only demean those who suffer and pick at the wound. Forgiving another takes time and work. It's something we must

practice every day. It begins with recognition and thanksgiving that we have been forgiven. We are the beneficiaries of the crucified one who, hanging between two thieves, prayed, "Father, forgive them" (Lk. 23:34). That is the cry of infinite forgiveness, a cry we are to echo in our own lives, in our families, our work places, our parishes, our day to day life.

Forgiveness doesn't originate in us. It begins with God. That's what the slave who refused to forgive didn't understand. It was not about him. It's about God. We do not *choose* to forgive. We only choose to *share* the forgiveness we have already received. Then we chose again, and then again, and yet again. For most of us forgiveness is a process that we live into. Even though sometimes, we just can't. The pain is too much, the wound too raw, the memories too real. On those days we choose to *want* to forgive. Somedays we chose to want to want to forgive. Then there are those days that all we can do is choose to want to want to want to forgive. But we choose because that's the choice Christ made.

How many times must we choose to forgive? Tell me this. How many times have you been hurt and suffered by the actions or words of another? How many times has anger or fear controlled you? How many times has the thought of revenge filled you? How many times have you shuddered at the sight, the name, or the memory of another? How many times have you replayed in your head the argument with another? That's how many times you choose. "Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times".

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