

BMA 13 SEPTEMBER 2020

“FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION”

CALL TO WORSHIP

We come as we are, weighed down by worries or elated by joy, or somewhere in between, to worship a God who hears us, encourages us and challenges us. May this hallowed hour bring us together in our distanced lives, as we absorb God’s love into our own being and radiate it to the world around.

STF 436: What shall I do my God to love?

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| 1 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 ? | 4 My trespass was grown up to heaven ;
but, far above the skies,
in Christ abundantly forgiven,
I see your mercies rise. |
| 2 Your sovereign grace to all extends,
immense and unconfined ;
from age to age it never ends ;
enfolds all humankind. | 5 The depth of all-redeeming love
what angel tongue can tell ?
O may I to the utmost prove
the gift unspeakable ! |
| 3 Throughout the world its breadth is known,
wide as infinity ;
so wide it never passed by one,
or it had passed by me. | 6 Come quickly, gracious Lord, and take
possession of your own ;
my longing heart vouchsafe to make
your everlasting throne. |

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

READINGS: Genesis 50, 15-21, Matthew 18, 21-35

SERMON

In different versions of Lord’s Prayer we may ask for ‘debts’, ‘trespasses’ or ‘sins’ to be forgiven. All are part of the picture in today’s parable.

Start with question of scale: 1 talent worth more than 15 years wage of labourer, so 10,000 biggest imaginable. 1 denarius was the usual day’s wage. We are given whole of creation and not expected to pay penny back. How not to act in same way to others?

How ironic countries that once refused to cancel debt of poorest countries were later prepared to pile countless billions into bailing out their own banks and other institutions, now in Covid time putting everything into economic support to avoid social collapse. Yet if financial cancellation of debt may be qualified with all sorts of arguments, not least about moral hazard, preventing debtor from piling up more debt, Jesus’s point goes much further. Dire consequences are promised if we do not forgive from the heart. Easier if faced with real regret. We heard the age old story ending Genesis of when Joseph is finally reconciled with his brothers, despite a hint of duplicity on their part.

The great strength of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was that perpetrators of atrocities were brought face to face with their victims, when an admission of

guilt opened the door to forgiveness and reconciliation, still one of the foundations of the new SA. The peace process in Northern Ireland was helped by people like Gordon Wilson, whose daughter was killed at Enniskillen, dedicated to seeking reconciliation. The idea of restorative justice in our own day, shamefully undervalued, brings perpetrators and victims together to allow perpetrators to face up to what they have done.

Yet what if the perpetrators are not there to be forgiven (one might think of 9/11) or don't want to be forgiven, what is route to forgiveness? After 2005 London bombings we heard of an Anglican priest whose daughter was one of the victims. Somehow it was assumed she would forgive, because it was her Christian duty. Yet she couldn't, and who could humanly blame her?

Sometimes healing comes with contact. As we meet Muslims in our midst, hear from them their understanding of faith so different from the extremists.

There is an iconic image from 1970s of West German Chancellor Willi Brandt kneeling at Auschwitz – seeking forgiveness for German nation. Taking the knee has this year become symbolic of the Black Lives Matter movement, reminding us of the need to seek forgiveness from people of African descent for enslavement, colonial and later exploitation, or in our churches for lack of hospitality to those of different races in past years. We have a debt barely addressed by level of foreign aid budget.

So the links become clearer between forgiveness of monetary debt and of wrong done. So much derives from human selfishness and greed. The slave in the parable is forgiven so much, but immediately forgets and is aware only of what is due to him. In the debate over rights and responsibilities, self-interest so often comes first. But we cannot recognise our self-interest in a more stable and fairer world; instead we build gated compounds and fence off our borders against all comers, desperate in fleeing conflict, persecution or abject poverty.

All of us who are members of a society that built its prosperity on exploitation share the responsibility. If we do not become part of the solution, we remain part of the problem. So we too need to seek forgiveness from those who have been enslaved by our society's greed, or lack of care, or wilful ignorance. As God forgives us in our confession of failure, we are strengthened to be a force for forgiveness and reconciliation in our own communities and throughout the world.

READ together STF 423: Forgive our sins as we forgive

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| 1 'Forgive our sins as we forgive,'
you taught us, Lord, to pray,
but you alone can grant us grace
to live the words we say. | 3 In blazing light your cross reveals
the truth we dimly knew,
how small the debts are owed to us,
how great our debt to you ! |
| 2 How can your pardon reach and bless
the unforgiving heart
that broods on wrongs, and will not let
old bitterness depart ? | 4 Lord, cleanse the depths within our
souls,
and bid resentment cease ;
then, reconciled by God to all,
our lives will spread your peace. |

Rosamond Eleanor Herklots (1905–1987)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

- For the universal Church
- For peace and justice in the world
- For those in authority
- For the concerns of the local community
- For those who suffer

LORD'S PRAYER

STF 720: We turn to you, O God of every nation

1 We turn to you, O God of every nation,
giver of good and origin of life ;
your love is at the heart of all creation,
your hurt is people's pain in war and death.

2 We turn to you, that we may be forgiven
for crucifying Christ on earth again ;
we know that we have never wholly striven
to share with all the promise of your reign.

3 Free every heart from haughty self-reliance,
our ways of thought inspire with simple
grace ;

break down among us barriers of defiance ;
speak to the soul of all the human race.

4 On all who rise on earth for right relations
we pray the light of love from hour to hour.
Grant wisdom to the leaders of the nations,
the gift of carefulness to those in power.

5 Teach us, good Lord, to serve the need of
others ;
help us to give and not to count the cost.
Unite us all to live as sisters, brothers ;
defeat our Babel with your Pentecost !

Fred Kaan (1929–2009)

BLESSING

Walk 13th September

**May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.**

As you walk spend some time thinking about:

- How you are feeling today and what might be making you feel this way
- Is there a saying, quote, Bible verse that is resonating with you and why it is important for you at the moment.

Try and find a tree or somewhere to sit for a while.

Read Psalm 1:1-3

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
They are like trees planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

The Book of Psalms is filled with images, the very first of which is of two ways and of a tree. The ways speak of the direction we take in life. One way is that of the wicked, the sinner and the scoffer- those who do not depend on God, those who rebel against God's and those who mock God. The other way walks the righteous-those who depend on God. The tree is another image for those who depend on God. Their roots are deep in the earth next to a place that can nourish them, so they can flourish even in difficult times. The Psalms are full of wisdom and meaning that can help to nourish and provide a strength for the way we walk.

- **What does it mean to have deep roots?**
- **What brings you strength and encouragement?**
- **What do you take away from this Psalm?**

Take some time to thank God for the image of a tree planted by streams of living water and what it means for you. Thank God for the different ways we can be nourished and pray that God will help you grow the fruit of righteousness. May all this be done in and with the power of God who love us. AMEN.

Activity

Create your own well of things that nourish and sustain you.

Take a container and fill it with sayings, pictures, poems, Bible verses, activities that you can draw on when the road gets difficult.

Be as creative as you like!

