

At Home Service 13th September 2020

Call to worship

Praise the Lord, my soul! All my being, praise His holy name!

Praise the Lord, my soul, and do not forget how kind He is. **Psalm 103:1**

Singing the Faith 73 – Fill thou my life, O Lord my God – Horatius N. Bonar (1808 – 1889)

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| 1 | Fill thou my life, O Lord my God,
in every part with praise,
that my whole being may proclaim
thy being and thy ways. | 2 | Not for the lip of praise alone
nor e'en the praising heart
I ask, but for a life made up
of praise in every part: |
| 3 | Praise in the common things of life,
its goings out and in;
praise in each duty and each deed,
however small and mean. | 4 | Fill every part of me with praise;
let all my being speak
of thee and of thy love, O Lord,
poor though I be and weak. |
| 5 | So shalt thou, gracious Lord, from me
receive the glory due;
and so shall I begin on earth
the song for ever new. | 6 | So shall no part of day or night
from sacredness be free;
but all my life, in every step,
be fellowship with thee. |

Prayer

Lord, you fill my life with good things. The Scripture says that because of that I stay young and strong like an eagle. I'm not that young any more, and sometimes I don't feel very strong, but with you alongside me I can rise above the difficult things in my life, and fly with you.

I thank you, today, for the gift of life.

I thank you too for the home in which I live, for food and clothing, for those you have given to me to love, and for your presence with me.

Help me to rest in your presence in the same way as a little child rests in the presence of a loving parent.

Amen

Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught his disciples, I pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 18:21-35 (other readings for today: *Genesis 50:15-21, Romans 14:1-12*)

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?"

"No, not seven times," answered Jesus, "but seventy times seven, because the Kingdom of Heaven is like this. Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants' accounts. He had just begun to do so when one of them was brought to him who owed him millions of pounds. The servant did not have enough to pay off his debt, so the king ordered him to be sold as a slave, with his wife and his children and all that he had, in order to pay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before the king. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will repay you everything!' The king felt sorry for him, so he forgave him the debt and let him go.

"Then the man went out and met one of his fellow-servants who owed him a few pounds. He grabbed him and started choking him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he said. The fellow-servant fell down and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!' But he refused; instead, he had him thrown in jail until he should pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very upset and went

to the king and told him everything. So he called the servant in. 'You worthless slave!' he said. 'I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just because you asked me to. You should have had mercy on your fellow-servant, just as I had mercy on you.' The king was very angry, and he sent the servant to jail to be punished until he should pay back the whole amount."

And Jesus concluded, "That is how my Father in heaven will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Reflection

I struggle with forgiveness..... both forgiving others and accepting that I have been forgiven. I know that I'm not alone, but it's shaming to admit my problem. Not only have I been a follower of Jesus for 55 years I am also an ordained minister and should have sorted this out by now. Forgiveness is a core part of our faith. Jesus taught us to pray, '*forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us*' (GNB) or '*Forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors*' (NRSV).

The parable that Jesus told of the *Unforgiving Servant* talks about debts. Wouldn't it be easy if all that we needed to forgive were just debts about money owed? I have been in the fortunate position of being able to let go of financial debts that have been owed to me. Writing them off was a relief, both to me and to the person who owed the money. They were released from their binding to me, and I continued my life free of the background question of 'when will I get my money back?' and free to enjoy what I had.

Sadly, I find it so much harder to let go of wrongs that have been done to me. Especially those committed by people in positions of trust, who have manipulated situations, told outright lies and taken advantage of the weak and vulnerable in order to maintain their own position and/or get something they want.

Because I haven't been able to be so busy over this period of 'Lockdown' I've had time to think and have come face to face with person I am. I have remembered some of the things I have done that have been very unhelpful to other people. Even as 9 year old I can remember encouraging a friend to tell a half-truth so that we wouldn't get into trouble for climbing up a down pipe. Half-truths are even worse than outright lies, as they manipulate situations and people.

It is with some degree of horror that I realise that the things I find difficult to forgive are the very things that have been part of my life. Looking again at that list, I ask, 'is that really me?' And, in all honesty, I think it is!

So, why do I behave like that? Why do I feel the need to protect myself? put up barriers? control a situation?

One the shocking things about the parable of the *Unforgiving Servant* is that, having been released from such a huge debt we expect him to act with compassion toward someone who owed him a small amount. Why did he act like that?

I wonder if he really believed that he was free from the debt he owed? Maybe he was trying to protect his future by calling in the money that he was owed, just in case the king changed his mind?

When I first started engaging with this parable I felt that the use of money as an example was not very helpful. But, now I can see that Jesus had a point. If I can release a financial debt owed to me, and know the freedom of that decision, why I should I not be able to do the same in other areas of my life?

I wonder if the truth is that I haven't fully accepted that I am a beloved child of God, forgiven and set free to live life in all its fullness. Like the *Unforgiving Servant* I haven't embraced the reality of release from debt.

Jesus knows how hard it is to forgive, which is why he said we have to forgive seventy times seven. Maybe he is saying 'you need to keep working at it. Keep working at the process of forgiving others. Keep working at understanding you, also, have been forgiven. If you give up, and harbour your anger and resentment and fear, you will be embittered and tortured and unable to live life to the full.'

I wonder if there are things that you find difficult to forgive? Are those things present in your own life?

Jesus encourages us to pray and reflect on our lives, to come to him in all honesty and seek healing and forgiveness, and to keep working at it. Then, knowing that we are loved, forgiven and set free we will be able to do the same for others.

Let the following hymn give you time to come before God and open your heart to Him.

Singing the Faith 429 – Lord, we turn to you for mercy.

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| 1 | Lord, we turn to you for mercy:
may our prayerful words express
something of our heartfelt sorrow
for the sins we now confess. | 2 | We have trusted far too often
in our human strength and skill;
we have proudly disregarded
what we knew to be your will. |
| 3 | Yet by your immense compassion
you invite, accept, restore,
leading us to greater wholeness
than we ever knew before. | 4 | Your forgiveness lifts our burdens,
setting heart and spirit free
to fulfil our true potential,
all that we were meant to be. |
| 5 | For you teach a way of wisdom
we may clearly understand:
walking with the God of mercy
step by step, and hand in hand. | | |

Martin Leckebusch (b. 1962) - Words: © 1999, Kevin Mayhew Ltd, Buxhall, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 3BW Used by permission.

Prayers of intercession

(for each bidding, take time to bring before God situations that you have heard about)

Loving God, I pray for a world that is in turmoil.

I lift before you those whose lives have been turned upside down through the effects of fire, wind and flood.

Silent prayer

Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

I lift before you those whose lives have been turned upside down as a result of violence.

Silent prayer

Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

I lift before you those whose lives have been turned upside down through illness and disease.

Silent prayer

Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer

I lift before you those whose lives have been turned upside down because they are trying to do things differently.

Silent prayer

Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer. Amen.

Offering

Give thanks for each blessing you have received and offer back to God in proportion to what you have received.

(At this point please remember to put aside your financial gifts to send to your Church treasurer so that the work of your church and community can be sustained and continue)

Singing the Faith 553 – I am a new creation

I am a new creation,
no more in condemnation,
here in the grace of God I stand.
My heart is over-flowing,
my love just keeps on growing,
here in the grace of God I stand.

*And I will praise you, Lord,
yes, I will praise you, Lord,
and I will sing of all that you have done.
A joy that knows no limit,
a lightness in my spirit —
here in the grace of God I stand.*

Dave Bilborough (b. 1965) - Words and Music: © 1983, Thankyou Music. Administered by Kingswaysongs, a division of David C Cook <tym@kingsway.co.uk>
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Blessing

May the One who is merciful, slow to become angry and full of constant love be with you. (Psalm 103:8)
And may the blessing of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you, with those you love and those are called to love, this day and for evermore. Amen