

**Sunday Collects, Readings and Reflection**  
**13<sup>th</sup> September 2020 14<sup>th</sup> after Trinity**

*You can use this sheet in conjunction with our recorded service  
which you can find here <https://youtu.be/apxNxZAAG00>  
on the Christ Church Shamley Green YouTube channel  
or via the link provided on our website [www.shamleygreen.net](http://www.shamleygreen.net)*



**COLLECT**

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.

**FIRST READING**

**Genesis 50:15–21**

15 Realizing 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?'  
16 So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died,  
17 "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.

18 Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.'  
19 But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God?  
20 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.  
21 So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.'  
In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

**GOSPEL**

**Matthew 18:21-35**

21 Peter came and said to Jesus, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me,  
how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?'  
22 Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.  
23 For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king  
who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.  
24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him;  
25 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.  
26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying,  
"Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything."  
27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.  
28 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."  
29 Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him,  
"Have patience with me, and I will pay you."

30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.  
31 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.  
32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave!  
I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.  
33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?"  
34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.  
35 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** The Revd. Sally Davies (*Watch in our recorded service*)

It was the day everyone had been waiting for. Hundreds gathered outside the building. Hundreds of thousands watched on television around the world. All the world's press were there. Can you guess what day I'm talking about? It was the day when Winnie Mandela sat before the 'Truth and Reconciliation' Commission of the New South Africa. The accusations levelled against her were horrifying. The testimony of witnesses was in turn vehement and moving. The air shivered with anger, fear, hatred, pain, pride. In the chair Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Passionately committed to justice. Equally passionate in his belief in and practice of forgiveness.

For us thousands of miles away, it was an amazing and instructive opportunity to see acted out what we so often think and talk about as Christians. For example, whenever we pray, be it on our own or when we worship together, we seek to acknowledge and confess our sins and to receive God's forgiveness. Think too how often we pray 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done' but that is not just a familiar phrase in a well-worn prayer, rather it is serious commitment because the way to God's kingdom has to be prepared. The way into new life and wholeness of being is neither an entitlement nor a tick-box exercise. Things have gone badly wrong in this world. Things have gone badly wrong in our own lives and relationships. One does not build a new house over a rubbish tip but on cleared and clean ground. Similarly, a new creation of light and order can only arise if the darkness and chaos are dealt with. Now darkness and chaos are frightening. We avoid confronting them if we can, particularly if it is *our* darkness, *our* chaos. However, we are co-creators with God of the new creation. Jesus teaches that his kingdom is among *us* and it comes *through us*. There is no slipping in through the back door. There is no fast track. If we watch and listen, we can see God teaching us this again through many situations both on the international scene and closer to home. We can hear him teaching us this through this morning's readings which show us the bigger picture, the interconnectedness of people's destinies and the impossibility of considering our own redemption in isolation from that of others.

There had to be both truth *and* reconciliation if there was truly to be a *new* South Africa. There must be both truth *and* reconciliation if there is ever to be a new peace accord in the Middle East, any hope for Syria, a future for the still new country of South Sudan, healing and rebuilding for divided communities across the world. As all the prophets and visionaries of the Bible and Christian history remind us, there must be justice *and* mercy if there is to be a new heaven; judgement *and* healing if there is to be a new earth. We hope this for ourselves but we must also practise it towards others if our own healing is to be complete. Jesus' story in this morning's gospel shows how receiving and enjoying God's mercy towards *us* is compromised when we do not extend the same mercy towards *others*. We cannot be free while others are slaves; we cannot know the full reality and blessing of God's forgiveness if our hearts are embittered and set upon revenge. Someone once said: 'War is not the only arena where peace is done to death. Wherever suffering is ignored, there will be the seeds of conflict, for suffering degrades and embitters and enrages.' A good description of the corrosive effect of the hurt and damage inflicted upon us by others and vice versa. We cannot be at peace where injustice is unacknowledged and we cannot receive God's gifts of healing and reconciliation when our hands are full, holding on to anger and resentment, grudges past and present.

'Wherever suffering is ignored, there will be the seeds of conflict, for suffering degrades and embitters and enrages.' Do you know who said that? Aung San Suu Kyi in her Nobel lecture in 2012. And yet look how compromised she has now become and how terrible the suffering of the Rohingya Muslims: persecuted, dispossessed, exiled. Desmond Tutu in his not yet peaceful retirement wrote to Suu Kyi, and I quote, 'breaking my vow to remain silent on public affairs out of profound sadness. My dear sister: if the political price of your ascension to the highest office in Myanmar is your silence, the price is surely too steep. A country that is not at peace with itself, that fails to acknowledge and protect the dignity and worth of all its people, is not a free country.' We might add 'a *person* who is not at peace with her/himself, who fails to acknowledge and protect the dignity and worth of all people, is not a free person.'

It is asking a lot. Power, pride, hurt and anger all counsel against it. Desmond Tutu trod a tightrope when he counselled Winnie Mandela to admit things had gone badly wrong and to express personal sorrow and responsibility. He, and other voices heard in recent times, skate on very thin ice when they appeal to the victims of atrocities to forgive and let the desire for vengeance go. And in seeking to uncover the truth and uphold justice, they fall foul of those who want to 'let sleeping dogs lie' and 'move on', claiming 'there are things best left unsaid', while at the same time, in seeking to foster reconciliation and new partnerships, they fall foul of those who in their pain and anger find it hard to forgive and want their chance in the ring to hit back. It is asking a lot. It is a high risk enterprise which makes as many enemies as friends. But it is the way of God's prophet, and Desmond Tutu has ever been that. And it is the way of God's people, and we are surely that.

To see a nation like South Africa which has witnessed some of the most appalling, notorious injustices and evils of our time also trying to follow this way makes me think the kingdom of God has truly come a little closer. To see people, who have been badly hurt by other people, trying to forgive and rebuild shows us that Christ is still active in the world. It is hard. It is painful. Jesus said we enter the kingdom of God through a narrow gate; 'for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it.' But we hold on to this: we travel with a purpose, with a destination in view, the kingdom of God, and we follow in the footsteps of Christ who has himself already travelled that road and passed through that narrow gate on the way of the cross. He has broken a path for us to follow and does not ask of us anything he himself has not already attempted and conquered. We know we will not get there on our own; we may not always be able to forgive or receive forgiveness; our attempts at peace and justice may be feeble at best or fail at worst; but we do not travel alone and with Christ's help, we will get there, we will squeeze through that narrow gate into the kingdom of heaven. Let's just see how many others we can manage to bring with us...

## FINAL PRAYER

God of debts forgiven,  
you call to account our hunger for power;  
you disturb hierarchies which crush the weak:  
break the vicious cycles of revenge and domination  
that we might look to him whose mercy never ends,  
Jesus Christ our redeemer. Amen.  
(*Steven Shakespeare 'Prayers for an Inclusive Church'*)

## BLESSING

Christ crucified draw you to himself,  
to find in him a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope,  
and the assurance of sins forgiven;  
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
rest upon you this day and remain with you always. Amen.

