

SUNDAY REFLECTIONS

Sunday 13 September 2020 | The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

TODAY'S READINGS

Genesis 50.15-21 | Psalm 103.1-13 | Romans 14.1-12 | Matthew 18.21-35



'Christ the Saviour'
(Христос Вседержитель - 14th century Russian icon)
attributed to Andrei Rublev

The sermon for today has been prepared by Ian Service, Lay Reader at St James, Arnside.

✚ In the name of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Often, Old Testament readings can be difficult – prophets forth-telling doom and destruction, or lists of awkward names. But today's reading is totally different. It comes from the end of one of the best stories in the Bible, a favourite of mine and many people. The tale of Joseph (with his coat of many colours) and his eleven brothers is so different from other sagas from this period of history. With no one-eyed giants or other mythical beasts, this is, to quote the Archers "an everyday story of country folk". Admittedly, the dreams are a bit out of the ordinary, but the characters are remarkably realistic – the jealousy and sibling rivalry ring true. No wonder that the story was transformed by Andrew Lloyd Webber into a hit West End musical.

Angered by Joseph's dreams implying that they would all bow down to him, they sell their brother into slavery in Egypt. The brothers could never foresee that he would end up as Prime Minister of that country, nor that they would need, when famine struck, to beg for food from Joseph. He tests them to see whether they have changed at all, then reveals who he is and welcomes them. Our reading is some time later when father Jacob has died, and the brothers now fear that Joseph will belatedly exact his revenge. So they concoct this story of Jacob making a dying request to Joseph to forgive them.

It is no surprise that Joseph weeps. Here are his brothers up to their old tricks again – lying and scheming, because they distrust Joseph. They cannot believe that Joseph could really forgive them – they wouldn't forgive people who had done this to them. Joseph had hoped that they were reformed characters, but whether or not they are, he still forgives them, because of the type of person he is, not because of the type of people they are. Looking back over his life Joseph can see how God has incorporated even his brothers' ill will and mistreatment of him into the 'good' that God had planned for Joseph, his family and the nation of Egypt. If any retribution is required for the things the brothers did, Joseph is happy to leave it to God. In our cynical age, we have a saying "If something seems too good to be true, it probably is", but Joseph genuinely does love and forgive his brothers, despite everything.

Our gospel reading jumps forward a millennium from the time of Joseph. Following on from last Sunday's reading about a dispute within the church, Peter asks about forgiveness. Contemporary advice from the rabbis was that one should be willing to forgive three times. Peter knows that Jesus constantly tells them to go beyond the teaching of the rabbis, so he suggests that to forgive up to seven times might be appropriate. Jesus totally demolishes this idea by effectively saying that there should not be a limit on the number of times we are willing to forgive (he is certainly not suggesting that we keep a log of how many times we have forgiven someone and eventually say "That's it, that's the seventy-eighth time – I am not forgiving you!"). Jesus knows that this concept of unlimited forgiveness will seem hard to Peter, so goes on to emphasise it with a parable.

As with many parables of Jesus, we should not get bogged down in the minutiae of the details – how much were the sums owed, what exactly happens to the debtor in prison – but focus on the key message: God is prepared to forgive each and every one of us an enormous debt but he expects us to show the same forgiveness to those around us, whose debts, in comparison, are much smaller. All those times we have let God down, all those times we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves, all the good that we could have done but did not do. Not that God just forgot that debt, but paid it in full in Jesus Christ crucified.

This reciprocal forgiveness is written into the Lord's prayer each time we say it. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" to use one translation. The parable suggests that our forgiveness is conditional on us being forgiving, but equally our forgiving should flow naturally as a consequence of us having been forgiven. The two should be inseparable.

A reason why this is important is that forgiveness is a two-way process. Its impact on the forgiver is as great as its impact on the forgiven, if not greater. I don't want to dwell on the negative side of this, but I am sure we can all think of individuals, either from our own experience or from media reports, who have suffered some tragedy or personal wrong, and who then let this colour the rest of their lives. Consumed by bitterness, they pursue a quest for vengeance, possibly described as 'justice' and their whole subsequent life is blighted.

In contrast, I want to remind you of one individual. On 8 November 1987, Enniskillen held its annual Remembrance Sunday ceremony to honour those who had served in the British Armed Forces. The Provisional IRA had planted a 40lb bomb in the town's Reading Rooms behind the cenotaph. It was timed to go off at 10:43am just before the ceremony was due to start. The explosion killed 11 people and injured 64.

The blast buried Gordon Wilson and his daughter, Marie, in rubble. Unable to move, he held her hand and comforted her as she lay dying. Her last words were, "Daddy, I love you very much". Five minutes later rescuers pulled Wilson and his daughter out from under the collapsed building. Marie never regained consciousness and died later in hospital. Hours after the bombing, in a BBC interview, Gordon described his experience, but went on to add "I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. I will pray for these men tonight and every night." Over the months and years ahead, Gordon's spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation was a beacon of light helping to lead the Province out of those dark days. Being able to forgive brought him a serenity which can be clearly seen in photographs, and through him a blessing to the whole community.

God grant that we are never called upon to forgive such an atrocity, but God grant us the strength to forgive whatever debts we feel others owe us.

Amen.

The Collect
for The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

**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.**

Old Testament Reading

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.

Genesis 50.15-21

Gospel Reading

Then Peter came 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 should 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 should 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.'

Matthew 18.21-35

Prayers of Intercession

- ▶ for the Church of God throughout the world - for its peace and unity and all who seek to bear witness to the good news of Christ;
- ▶ for the world which Christ has redeemed, for an end to bitterness, hatred and suffering;
- ▶ for those who are isolated, alone or afraid, that they might find reassurance and comfort in the presence of God;
- ▶ for those struggling to find hope, for whom the way ahead is difficult;
- ▶ for the strength and the will to forgive as we have been forgiven by Christ;
- ▶ for all whom we love and care for, remembering those who have no-one to pray for them;
- ▶ for our schools and their communities, for teachers, staff, children, parents and families at the start of the new school year, that they may know the peace of Jesus;
- ▶ for all who are sick or suffering, those known to us and those known to God alone, that they may know Christ's healing and wholeness in body, mind and spirit;
- ▶ for the departed, and all who mourn and grieve the loss of loved ones, that we may know the hope and comfort of Christ who is the resurrection and the life;
- ▶ for glimpses of God's grace in the week ahead, that we might be renewed in faith, and so be enabled to share with others the gift of Christ's peace.

We remember in pray also those to be ordained in the Diocese this Michaelmas, that they may know the Lord's strength to hear afresh his call as they prepare for the duties and joys of ordained ministry.

To be ordained Deacon by the Bishop of Carlisle at Carlisle Cathedral on Saturday 26 September:

- Victoria Sekasi to serve Two Valleys Mission Community
- Lawrence Basham to serve Keswick Mission Community
- Nina Orchard to serve Two Rivers Mission Community
- Andrew Callaway to serve Solway Plain Mission Community
- Jane Natrass to serve Central Lakes Mission Community
- Duncan Jackson to serve the Benefice of Egremont and Haile
- Gill Davidson to serve Cockermouth Team Area Mission Community

To be ordained Priest at services in their benefices in the coming weeks:

- Madeline Simpson to serve the Benefice of Ulverston
- Craig Bentley to serve the Benefice of Natland and the Benefice of Old and New Hutton
- Fran Parkinson to serve the Benefice of High Westmorland
- Peter Dixon to serve the Benefice of Holme Eden and Wetheral
- Duncan Jackson to serve the Benefice of Egremont and Haile

THE SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

EXPLORING VOCATIONS

<https://www.facebook.com/DioceseCarlisle/>

On **Monday 14 September at 7.00pm** on the Diocese's Facebook Page, Bishop Emma will host an evening looking at encouraging vocations; a chance to hear encouraging stories that have emerged over recent months and to consider what God might be calling each of us to as we look to the future. Please do 'come' along!



KENT ESTUARY MISSION COMMUNITY PRAYER MEETINGS

<http://bit.ly/KEMCPrayer>

The Kent Estuary Mission Community met last Tuesday via Zoom for a time of prayer together. The next gathering will be on **Tuesday 22 September at 10.30am** (led and coordinated by Arside Methodist Church). It is hoped that these gatherings will serve to strengthen our common faith and shared fellowship across the Kent Estuary as we look ahead to working together as church communities into the future.

This Tuesday (15 September) at 7.00pm the Kent Estuary Mission Community Partnership will meet via Zoom for a meeting with the Kendal Deanery Mission Enabler, The Reverend Mat Ineson. The Partnership is intended as a means of discussing and helping to focus the work of the Mission Community as we move forward. Please do pray for the Partnership and its representatives as they meet, that the Lord might guide our development together as healthy communities united in our desire to know Christ and make him known in the Kent Estuary.

CARLISLE DIOCESAN HARVEST APPEAL

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmI48TEF3Q4>

Last Sunday the Bishop of Carlisle's Harvest Appeal was launched online by Bishop James and Bishop Emma, it can be viewed on YouTube using the link above.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND RESOURCES

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

<https://soundcloud.com/the-church-of-england>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>

<https://www.youtube.com/thechurchofengland>



The Church of England Service comes from All Saints, Kings Heath in the Diocese of Birmingham, reflecting on the theme of forgiveness. The service can be found online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJRtVwucldc>

DAILY HOPE PHONE LINE

The Church of England has developed a national **free** phone line to help support those who might feel particularly isolated at this time, especially if they have no access to the internet. The phone number is **0800 804 8044** and provides a collection of readings, prayers and hymns that can be listened to, all of which are updated regularly. If you know of anyone who might appreciate this service, please do let them know the phone number and pray that it will be a blessing to many.

