

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 13 Nov 2022
Service/s: *Across the diocese*
Series: Hallowed be your name
Title: Forgive us our sins
Passage: Matthew 18:21-35
Outline: The joy of forgiveness
The challenge of forgiveness

INTRODUCTION

This is week 6 of 7 in our studies on the Lord's prayer.

The Lord's prayer - where we are taught that we approach prayer as a **trusting child** approaching a **Father** more willing to **hear** than we are to **pray**

We come in prayer in an attitude of **worship** – of **adoration** – asking God to cause his **name** – to cause **himself** – to be **honoured everywhere**

We come as **loyal citizens** to a **King** asking him to bring on his **Kingdom**... – here and now – and for all eternity...

We come in surrender – asking him to cause his **will** to be **done**

And we come as **dependents** – praying each day that we might receive our **bread** – **physical sustenance** that we need to keep **going**. //

And as we come to this **next line** – we realise too, that we come as **sinners**... or **debtors** – acknowledging that we have a **debt** before God we cannot possibly **meet** – and we ask him to take that **away – to forgive the debt**

...and then this strange part to the line – I wonder what you've thought over the years about what this means – this strange line which adds – 'even as we forgive those who sin against us...'

...as if we're saying to God – as **we** forgive others – you would do well to follow our example and forgive us!

Well – need to unpack this line a little... so I want to spend a little time on

1. The **joy** of forgiveness
and then a little on
2. The **challenge** of forgiveness

First

1. THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

Do **you** know the joy of forgiveness?

Do you remember the joy in Luke 15 in the parables of the lost coin and lost sheep and lost son?

Jesus says, after telling the story of the owner who found their lost sheep: *I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent*

And after the woman who finds her lost coin: *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

And then when the son returns – oh – wow – what a party the father throws! – shoes, ring, fattened calf – music and dancing... these are celebrations of **repentance AND forgiveness!**

Forgiveness is a **priority** for Jesus...

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You remember the paraplegic let down on a stretcher by his mates through a hole in the roof – right at the feet of Jesus...

They went to all that trouble in the great hope that Jesus would heal the man and that he would get up and walk back up the street...

...but when confronted with the man and his tragic circumstance Jesus didn't say anything about the man's **physical** state but his **spiritual** state...

Son, your sins are forgiven

Implication... the man's sins were more **important** than his **legs!**

Being out of relationship with God because of his sin mattered way more than his being unable to walk

Now in this case, to demonstrate he had authority to forgive sin, Jesus went on to address that secondary need... but hear this clearly – if today you're **unforgiven** – because you've never in reality sought forgiveness... than **that** is your most **pressing issue**... !

Not your **finances**, not your **family**, not rising **interest rates**, not loss of **crops** because of the **wet**... if you're **unforgiven**... that's the **most significant issue in your life** right now

...because you don't want to **lose your life tonight** and stand before God **unforgiven!** //

Forgive us our sins... Jesus recommends we pray

...because just as we are dependent on our Father's provision for daily bread

...so are we daily dependent on our Father's **forgiveness**...

For although there will be that **FIRST** time repentance – where we change **sides** and climb on **board** with the **King**...

...there remains **daily** failures to **obey**... **daily** things we do which we shouldn't... **daily** things we **ought** to have done which we **don't**... ////

How is it that our Father can **forgive** our **sin**?

some people like to think that God is somehow a benevolent grandfather who simply looks at the circumstances and says, "You know, don't worry about that. I can excuse everything."

He can't, because his character is such that justice must be served.

If you or I think for a moment that an attempt to **excuse behaviour** or to smooth things **over** equals **forgiveness**, we're flat out **wrong**.

God does not overlook **sin**.

Well then, what does he **do**?

The answer is, he provides **propitiation** for our sin.

Many of you will have grown up with the old BCP communion service, and every communion – after the assurance of forgiveness, your minister read what was known as the 'comfortable words'... because they are Bible verses **full** of **comfort**... and one of those verses – read:

If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins. From 1 John 2:1

Propitiation.

The more modern versions say: He is "*the **atonement sacrifice** for our sins.*"

God's holy anger against sin, falls upon his **Son, Jesus**.

The fact is, we deserve God's **wrath** on **account** of **sin**. ////

But God's wrath – appropriate anger – is turned away from us because it has fallen on **Jesus!** //

Punishment is not politically correct anymore.

Everybody has a **condition**; they don't have a bad **attitude**.

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Everybody is **painful**; they're not **sinful**.

People makes **mistakes**, but they don't **sin**

They make poor **choices**, but not **sin** ///

And that's why the notion of judgement is so very difficult for people to get their head around.

The **justice** of **God** demands that our sin should be **punished**.

And yet the **death** of the Lord **Jesus** fully satisfied **God's holy judgment**.

But it is not as if God's judgement was just handed out on some sort of innocent **bystander**...

Verses I've shared with you many times before from 2 Corinthians 5

God was **in Christ** reconciling the **world** to **himself**.

God made him who had **no sin**, to be **sin** for **us**.

God **himself** met the **cost**, so it could be **removed** from **us**.

Propitiation— all of the **wrath** that I deserve, all of the **hell** that I have to pay, for all of the **royal mess** that I have **made** – taken away by **Jesus**.

Jesus hits the **delete** key, it never comes back up on the screen.

He never brings it back up. It's gone!

If he was using a Mac, he would drag it to the garbage icon and dump it in there, and it's gone. Gone!

What does our communion service say? Speaking of Jesus, it says...

By his death on the cross
and rising to new life,
he offered the one true sacrifice for sin
and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

You remember Psalm 103?

*Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
³ who forgives all your sins*

*The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

What **joy**!

What **relief**!

How **astonishing**!

How **wonderful**!

Have you been forgiven?

I hope you know the sheer **joy** of **forgiveness** today

our **forgiveness** has been **won** and we can give **thanks**...

Second

2. THE CHALLENGE OF FORGIVENESS

Here it is, plain and simple....

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Forgive us our sins... *as we forgive those who sin against us...*

And the question is 'do we'? – do we forgive? And what happens if we don't?

And in Matthew's gospel, the Lord's Prayer is followed by these searching words ¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* ¹⁵ *But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

Well – I'm **puzzled** here

How is it that **OUR** forgiveness of others, in the context of the Lord's Prayer seems to be held up to God as an example... Lord – **you** forgive... if **we** can, **you** can....

But right **after** – God's forgiveness of us, is presented as **conditional** upon **our** forgiveness of **others**... indeed – **withheld** if we can't or **don't forgive others**? //

Perhaps a **parable** Jesus told will help

It is recorded in Matthew 18 – you're probably familiar with it...

A servant owes a King a **huge** debt. Hard to imagine how he would have come to owe this amount... or how he could ever repay it!

Jesus is kind of going **over the top** to make the **point**...

The point is the **slave** can do **nothing** about his own **plight**. Even to **contemplate** the **possibility** is **absurd**.

But miraculously and inexplicably the King does something about it. He **forgives** the whole **debt**.

We're asked to feel what the **slave** must have **felt**.

Surely, we think, he would have been absolutely **overcome** with **surprise** and **gratitude** and **joy**.

Overwhelmed that he could be so **fortunate**.

Blown away to such an extent that it couldn't **help** but overflow to those around him.

But **no**.

We're **shocked**. **Speechless**...

...because far from becoming a **changed, moved, gracious, forgiving** person because he has received such massive **generosity**, he meets someone who owes him hardly anything and seizes him by the throat demanding he pay this paltry sum back. It's **unthinkable**!

And that **twist** is the **point**.

Generous **forgiveness** – if **grasped**, if **understood**, if **appreciated**, if **embraced**.... **Will** result in **generous forgiveness**.

This guy was **clueless** – completely **blind** to his debt which had been **cancelled**! //

NOW – and this is really important – this is not to say that what was done wrong didn't **matter**.

It plainly did. The context of Matthew 18 shows that if someone has sinned against you – go and talk to them... if they don't listen... take one or two others... if they don't listen tell it to the church... if they don't listen – isolate them....

Being sinned against mattered. And there were processes in place to challenge offenders to come to terms with their sin.

Forgiveness never means what happened is **OK**

Forgiveness **never** means justice no longer needs to be **served**.

Forgiveness **never** means that an abused **person** should return for more **abuse**!

Abusive behaviour ought **never** be permitted to go unchecked!

But - if God has forgiven **you** (through Jesus' death and resurrection), if you really **get** that,

...if you've woken up to God's **embrace** in **Christ**,

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...if you have a sense of being **loved** and **accepted** at the most fundamental **level** of your **being**,
... when that reality **bites**, you **can't stop** that overflowing to **others**.
Knowing you are **loved** and **forgiven** ignites a **power** within us to do the **same** to **others**. //

Now you may say to me – Mark – that person who has sinned against me – they've never **repented**...

Yeah – that's hard, isn't it??

Can you forgive when there's been no **repentance**??

I do think it's **possible**

Did the **Roman soldiers** who executed Jesus repent before Jesus called out, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?"*

Was it not while we were still **sinners**, Christ **died** for us?

Did the **drunken, drug-fuelled driver** who mowed down four children in Sydney a few years back repent before the parents of three of those children proclaimed their forgiveness and instituted 'I forgive you' day? ///

YOUR impossible debt has been **cancelled!**

That debt which you could never have **saved up** or **worked for**... has **gone!** Been **deleted!**

Cancelled because Jesus paid it on the **cross**.

And when you **get** that, when you get how **serious** your debt **was**... and how **generously** and **completely** it's been **wiped out**.... Then you can't stop that over-**flowing** to **others**.

Knowing you are loved and forgiven will **usually** ignite a power within us to do the same to **others**.

It doesn't **excuse** them.

It doesn't **condone** what they've done.

It doesn't give them **permission** to continue doing what they were doing.

But it **frees YOU**. It **liberates** you. It **releases** you from their clutches. It **frees** you from their **power**.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us....

What we are really saying is... Oh Lord... may forgiveness be what I receive... and what I live

As you forgive, may I forgive...

Not that our forgiveness might be a pattern for him...

But that his forgiveness, may be a pattern for us!

What does Ephesians 4 say? *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

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Let me close

Some of what we've explored together today might be very painful for some.

Some of you no doubt, have experiences from the past you've found very difficult to forgive

It may well be that there are issues to deal with and talk about.

I'm so thankful that Archdeacon Joy Harris – our minister at Canowindra is more than happy for you to contact her if you are a woman...

And I'm very happy for you to contact me about these matters if you are a man...

And I want to also say that in the instance that you have experienced abuse by a clergy person or church worker, then I urge you to call our HELPLINE on **1800 070 511**

Father, forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Yes, as you forgive, may I forgive...