

THEME – How many times?

Welcome and call to worship: Tim Bullock, Elm Hall Drive

Hello everyone, welcome to another Liverpool South Methodist online service. It is great to hear that churches in our Circuit are making the necessary plans to reopen buildings in the near future, if not already, but we are very pleased to continue with this form of worship at the same time.

It was only a matter of weeks ago that Matthew talked to us about returning to normal...I'm sure many people would like to give their thanks to all of those people making this possible in their church.

Let's open this week's service with our call to worship.

Be strong and bold;
Have no fear or dread, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you;
God will not fail you or forsake you.
Amen

Song: Dear Lord and Father of mankind

1 DEAR LORD AND FATHER OF MANKIND,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
In purer lives thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow thee.

3 O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!

4 With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of thy call,
As noiseless let thy blessing fall
As fell Thy manna down.

5 Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

6 Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier CCL59335

Prayers of Adoration and Confession – including The Lord's Prayer – Laura Burton (District Higher Education Chaplain)

Almighty God, we praise and worship you for you are a great and loving God. We give you thanks for the promises, the wonders and the blessings of this day. We thank you for the opportunity to worship your great name.

Creator God, we see your beauty and wonder all around us. Your majesty cannot be measured nor constrained but can be known and felt through you.

Heavenly Father, we come before you in Jesus' name, confessing that in our actions and reactions we have failed you.

In our loving and forgiving we have fallen short of your mark.

Father, we are frail, we are weak but through you we become strong. We come to you with all of our imperfections so that we may be more like our saviour.

In Jesus' name,
Amen

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Song: Here I am (Majesty)

HERE I AM, humbled by Your majesty
Covered by Your grace so free.
Here I am, knowing I'm a sinful man,
Covered by the blood of the Lamb.

Now I've found the greatest love of all is mine,
Since you laid down Your life, the greatest
sacrifice.

Majesty, Majesty
Your grace has found me just as I am,
Empty handed but alive in Your hands.
Majesty, Majesty
Forever I am changed by Your love,
In the presence of Your majesty

Here I am, humbled by the love that You give.
Forgiven so that I can forgive.
Here I stand, knowing that I'm Your desire
Sanctified by glory and fire.

Now I've found the greatest love of all is mine,
Since you laid down Your life, the greatest
sacrifice.

Majesty, Majesty
Your grace has found me just as I am,
Empty handed but alive in Your hands.
Majesty, Majesty
Forever I am changed by Your love,
In the presence of Your majesty

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Reading – Matthew 18:21-35 – Michael Sutcliffe, Elm Hall Drive

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?'

²² Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'²³

²³ 'Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold²⁵ was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶ 'At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ 'But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.²⁹ He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.

²⁹ 'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back."

³⁰ 'But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² 'Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

Sermon: Rev Paul Wilson

Matthew 18:21-35: Costly Forgiveness

15 August 2020 was the 75th Anniversary of VJ Day. 25 years ago, on the 50th Anniversary of VJ Day, I led a service where the Revd Ben Drewery preached on costly forgiveness. He remembered VJ Day, the day when he was released from a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Even after a few weeks of medical care, Ben's mother did not recognise him when he returned home. Ben suffered greatly at the hands of his captors. As a Methodist minister, Ben shared how he found it difficult to forgive those who had held him captive. However, as a University Lecturer, Ben had taught and established long-standing friendships with Japanese students. In a very emotional way, Ben told how he could not forgive his captors but had forgiven the Japanese nation. He prayed that Jesus would forgive his captors.

Forgiving others seems easy enough on the surface. If one has been forgiven, then one is forgiving. However, in real life, it is not quite so easy. We would hope that we could forgive those who have wronged us. But can we?

The words of the Lord's Prayer point us to the full cycle of forgiveness: 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.' In the context of the parable we have read, from Peter's questions at the outset to the parable of the steward's inconsistency, one is gently moved toward the conclusion, 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat you unless you forgive your brother from the heart.' (Matthew 18:35)

In Matthew 18, Jesus declares the characteristics of citizens of the kingdom of God. We must be those who care and protect children, care for the lost or strayed person, and offer the opportunity for people to be restored into the fellowship of the church. We are called to act differently from the culture expressed in the actions of those around us. As kingdom people, we should be living kingdom values. We should reflect God's character in our lives. We enter the kingdom through the forgiveness of our

sin. Our growth in the kingdom should be marked by the forgiveness received from God flowing out in forgiveness to others.

Peter's question, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' reflects our attitude when we want to give up on people who frequently wrong us. Is there a time when we don't have to forgive them?

Jesus answers, 'I tell you, not seven times but seventy times seven times.'

Peter had gone beyond the Rabbi's teaching of the day, which said that you must forgive a person three times. Peter thought he was being generous. Jesus, however, does away with all limits and calculations. Bibles differ in the translation. Some translations say, 'You must forgive seventy-seven times' others 'Seventy-times seven times.' If you are concerned about the number, you have missed the point. Forgiveness is to be unlimited.

In the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, there are three acts in the drama. The first is the merciful act of God. The King cancels the debt of the servant. The debt is one of great magnitude, which could never be paid, but God cancels it. Isn't this a statement about the amazing grace on the part of a merciful God?

Marcus Rashford, the Manchester United forward, has been in the news recently. He remembered his roots. He remembered having free-school meals and the sacrifices his mum made to put food on the table. During the lockdown, Rashford successfully campaigned to extend free school meals during the summer. Rashford has now teamed up with some of the biggest food brands to try to help reduce child food poverty. In remembering how his life began, he sought to use his influence to help those in need.

In our Christian lives, we must remind ourselves of our beginnings. Like David, we realise that 'Against God, God only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.' (Psalm 51:4) By worldly standards, we have been good people, but we realise that we have fallen short of God's standards and need God's forgiveness. With each return to the Lord's Table, we are reminded of the cost of our forgiveness.

Act two of the story reminds us of how quickly we forget. The comparison between the size of debt reminds us that we who have been forgiven much should forgive others. This is not easy. The parable clearly shows the slowness with which the mercy of God takes root in our hearts and becomes part of our nature. Spiritual formation is not merely a thing of the mind but also of the heart. The unmerciful steward processed the transaction with his head only. Forgiveness from the heart is a different matter. Here we have the goal for us to press on towards. We are to be forgiving and merciful towards others.

It is said, 'When we forgive two, people are set free.' How then do we live by that principle?

I received a letter about the rehabilitation of prisoners from the Chaplain General of Prisons. People go to prison for retribution, rehabilitation and now, even for reconciliation. Retribution is the punishment of incarceration or community service for a time commensurate with the crime. Rehabilitation is to enable offenders to return to society and offend no more. Reconciliation is to show them that they have harmed not property but people. As Christians, we believe in a God who forgives, and the Chaplaincy service in prisons proclaims such a gospel and seeks to bring rehabilitation in the heart of the new child of God.

The final act of the parable reminds us of the danger of being double minded. To receive mercy means that we must show mercy. If not, we do not receive the forgiveness of God in that area. By not forgiving, the door closes behind us, and we are in the cell of bitterness.

We should reflect the nature of God by the forgiveness we show to others. The conclusion of the sections says, 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each one of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.' Jesus is saying that God is serious about forgiveness, and we must be too.

We must forgive those who hurt us and release them from prison. In being forgiving, we see God's forgiveness breaking into our world. We are to be those who allow God's mercy to flow through us to transform our world. Forgiveness is not merely something that I need and should praise and thank God for. Forgiveness is something I must give others to release them to new life.

Prayers of Intercession: Edna Pye, Court Hey

Loving God,
If we are ill, strengthen us.
If we are tired, fortify our spirits.
If we are anxious, help us to consider the lillies of the field and the birds of the air. If we are grieving, comfort us.

Help us not to stockpile treasures from supermarkets in the barns of our larders.
Don't let fear cause us to overlook the needs of others more vulnerable than ourselves.
Fix our eyes on your story and our hearts on your grace.

Help us always to hold fast to the good,
See the good in others,
And remember there is just one world, one hope,
One everlasting love, with baskets of bread for everyone.

In Jesus we make our prayer,
The one who suffered, died and was raised to new life,
In whom we trust these days and all days. **Amen.**

You call us to speak to you in prayer— even when the places we would usually go to may not be available.
Help us to know your Spirit's presence wherever we pray.
Today we especially pray for all our ministers, may Clement and his family quickly feel part of our circuit family and this area. We pray for our local preachers, and all members of the team who contribute to this worship. In the name of Jesus. **Amen**

God of all hope we call on you today.
We pray for those who are living in fear:
Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of unemployment.
May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty.
For those people who are worried about attending worship.
For those needing to make decisions in order to care for others
For those who will feel more isolated by not being able to attend.
Grant us your wisdom.

Holy God, we remember that you have promised that
Nothing will separate us from your love – demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ.
Help us turn our eyes, hearts and minds to you. **Amen**

Song: Make me a channel of your peace

1 MAKE ME A CHANNEL OF YOUR PEACE.
Where there is hatred,
let me bring Your love.
Where there is injury,
Your pardon Lord,
and where there's doubt,
true faith in You:

O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love, with all my soul.

2 Make me a channel of Your peace

Where there's despair in life,
let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light;
and where there's sadness, ever joy:

O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love, with all my soul.

3. Make me a channel of Your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving to us all that we receive,
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Based on a traditional prayer
CCL59335

Blessing: Tim Bullock, Elm Hall Drive

That brings an end to our service for this week. Thank you to all of those people who have made it possible to share in worship in this way this week, and every week over the past few months. These services are continuing throughout this first quarter of the Methodist year, so please join us at the same time next week.

Let's finish by sharing the grace with one another.