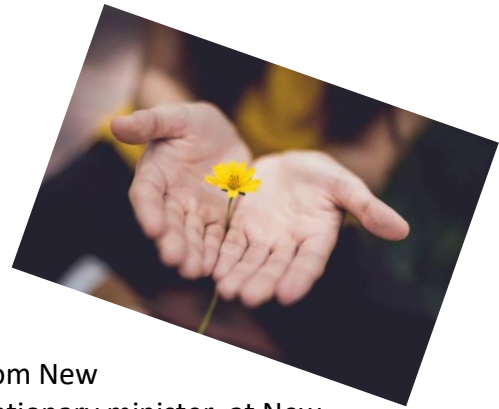


Podcast
13th September 2020
Matthew 18:21-35

Music
Welcome



Hello, and welcome to this week's worship podcast from New Kilpatrick Parish Church. I am Jeanette Peel, the probationary minister, at New Kilpatrick. Although Sunday worship is on in the church, our worship podcast will still be here each week. So even if you are unable to come to the building, church will still be coming to you.

Last Sunday, we began exploring Matthew's Gospel and what to do when someone wrongs you. It was a process that ended up with the possibility of the person in the wrong being completely shunned from their community. Does not sound very much like Jesus does it? And this week's passage follows directly on from it where Peter and Jesus exchange words about how many times you are supposed to forgive someone. But as always, it is never as simple as that and we are left with many more questions and reflecting on our relationships with others and ultimately with God than getting a straightforward answer.

Forgiveness for someone or in being forgiven can be a painful process. Bringing up old wounds when they have long been buried. Attempting to have an honest conversation with someone to clear the air and explain why you are hurting. 'Can I have a talk with you about something?' is not an indication of a conversation about the weather or a good film. Emotions can be raw and sometimes we feel things are best not said but that does not work in well with today's passage.

Centering Prayer

Holy God
Holy and forgiving God
May we linger in this space
Between you and each of us
And know the truth
That holds us
And shapes us today
That you speak into us
Until we hear anew
We are loved
We are forgiven
We are renewed
And we praise you

Praise you

For the life that brings
The opportunity that becomes real
The chance to grow out of the hurt we hold
And the pain we carry
And the anger that distorts

In such a moment as this
In such a place of prayer
In such a promise of renewal
May we know the life you open to us
Again
And again
And again
Grace-filled and love-shaped
And calls us
Back into life
Not as we were
But renewed
Reborn
Redeemed

Holy God
Holy and forgiving
May we journey with you
A community of the forgiven
Always learning
To lay down
And unburden others
As we expect for ourselves
And allow ourselves
And each other
To put aside that which limits us
And in grace and renewal
Believe what you give to us today
Is a new freedom
Found in being forgiven
And forgiving others



Hear us as we say the Lord's Prayer together

Our Father, who is in heaven
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory for ever. Amen

Story Introduction

One of the problems of reading the bible the way we do, is we do it in small bits, Sunday by Sunday and so we fail to get the run of thought or the nuances of how one Sunday's passage comes out of the previous which is case in point here. Last week and this week are one passage so we need to remind ourselves of last week: How to manage conflict and if ended with the less that compassionate verse saying if none of your efforts work in resolving the conflict, exclude the problem makers (which is all very relative).

But then you immediately read this passage: forgive. Seventy times, forgive. So despite excluding those who do not reconcile themselves with the church, no one is left off the hook. These folk, that caused the problems, your first response is to forgive, limitlessly. Forge the number suggested, that's hyperbole. Live towards those that trouble you, with forgiveness. So as we read this passage, remember the passage immediately before. In fact go and read a gospel cover to cover in one sitting. You might be surprised by it and find all sorts of new connections and understandings.

Reading – Matthew 18: 21-35

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 would 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 would 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."

Reflection

There are many things in life that can be thought of as difficult. As a young child, learning to read or ride your bike. I can still recall trying to help my son learn to ride. Stabilisers on and off, then on, then back off for good! And what about learning to drive – so much

responsibility and multi-tasking. Even getting through life, its ups and down, relationships, friendships, careers. The list could go on and on as we all could name something different or think one person's difficult task was an easy one for us.



But what about when it comes to following Jesus and experiencing God. Which was what Jesus was teaching us to do – experience God. Last week we were exploring what it meant to follow Jesus, its complexities and challenges that being a follower in Jesus means. This week's passage follows on directly from that text.

You may remember it was about what to do if someone did something to you and the ultimate price was treating them as a tax collector or Gentile. Does not sound very forgiving especially when we have Jesus' teachings about loving neighbour, doing good, helping those who are vulnerable or marginalised. And we know Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. And then this week we have the message about forgiveness.

Out of everything, I wonder if this is the most difficult thing we are tasked to do. Forgiving someone else. In our passage today, Peter thought he was being generous. Forgive them seven times, he said. In the book of Amos, we are told we should forgive three times but on the fourth, a punishment will prevail them. So, Peter appears to be adding a few extra times of forgiveness for good measure, knowing the number seven was a perfect number. But Jesus, as always, throws a spanner in the works, seventy-seven times although some translations say seventy times seven, 490 times, if you do the arithmetic. But that is not the question we should be asking; it really is immeasurable, limitless, or should be.

And the parable of the unforgiving servant, shows this. The sum owed to the King is an unimaginable amount. A talent was about 15 years' wages and Jesus' audience would understand this. It is an impossible sum to pay off in any person's lifetime. But that is the point. It is the limitless amount of forgiveness that the King gives the servant.

Compare this to the second servant's debt, 100 denarii, about 100 days wage and you see the illustration in full. That acceptance, understanding of forgiveness, grace and compassion did not extend further down the line to the next servant. The first servant was happy to be forgiven of his debt rather than to forgive another of a lesser debt. It is clear that one who has been forgiven must in turn forgive others.

Think back to the Lord's prayer which we have already said together this morning, 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.' Not some of them, or a particular debt, but all of them, and in it we are forgiven in the same way.

The snapping at someone at home or in a shop or wherever it might be just because we are in a bad mood, disputes that stop us speaking to someone because of something that happened many years ago. How many times do we forgive? We just do not get it!

I think this passage sets of a whole set of complex emotions – deep, hurtful, painful – of those who we are reluctant to forgive. But also those waiting for our forgiveness. Or is it a reminder of who we think we can never forgive. These are the big questions we must consider and ask ourselves honestly, what is holding us back?

What about those things that we believe are unforgivable? The 'I will never forgive you for this!' statement which is often shouted in anger or frustration. Where do these fit into Jesus' teaching and what do we do with them?

Jesus offers us the chance to think of forgiveness not as something of which we keep track or something we just keep doing without thinking but as something we should do in the context of our relationship with God. If God loves us so much that God continues to forgive us whenever we ask it, can we not do the same of others?

Maybe what we have to do is sit with all this discomfort, these raw emotions, of what Jesus' teaching means to us, and what being a follower means. The gospel is not meant to be cosy and comfortable. If it is, we have got it wrong. The issue is how hard forgiveness is. It is all about negotiating relationships with ourselves, with each other, and ultimately with God.

Often our resistance to forgive is rooted in our resistance to believe that we ourselves can be forgiven. The final truth of this exchange between Peter and Jesus is that as much as we place conditions over who, when and why we forgive others, we first do it to ourselves. Perhaps that is one of the hardest truths to hear.



If the church is the community of the forgiven, then all its relationships will be marked by a forgiveness which is not just words, but lived out action of a forgiving community, an essential characteristic, from your heart, which excludes counting how many times. The hard part now begins. Amen

Prayer

In this place
In this time
In this way
We pray
Making a space
For all those burdened
We all have a space here

We pray alongside our neighbour
Worried and anxious
For future and jobs and family

We pray alongside our neighbour
Fearing illness, loneliness, isolation

We pray alongside our neighbour
In renewed restrictions
Concern for each other
For schools and towns and local traders

We pray alongside leaders
And decisions and decision-making
That we might leave aside the politics
As we renew and rebalance an economy
That is just and a community
That is loving

We pray alongside the least
Facing the worst of the pandemic
Most vulnerable to the nationalism of the wealthy

We pray alongside medics and researchers
Alongside essential workers and carers
Alongside those who are physically and mentally ill
For the worry they have and
Alongside those who are bereaved
And hurting and lonely

We pray because we need to
And because we need heaven to hear
The concerns we have
And to know
Your love beside us

We pray within that love
And dare trust its promises
Of presence
Strength
Resilience
Compassion

We all have a space here
And we pray within our silences
That hold all we cannot say
For our world
And each other

Hear us
O God of this world
Hear us

So be it. Amen

Epilogue

Alfred Austin, an English poet who was appointed Poet Laureate in 1896, wrote these words:

Now bury with the dead years conflicts dead
And with fresh days let all begin anew.
Why longer amid shrivelled leaf-drifts tread,
When buds are swelling, flower-sheaths peeping through?
Seen through the vista of the vanished years,
How trivial seem the struggle and the crown,
How vain past feuds, when reconciling tears
Course down the channel worn by vanished frown.
How few mean half the bitterness they speak!
Words more than feelings keep us still apart,
And, in the heat of passion or of pique,
The tongue is far more cruel than the heart.
Since love alone makes it worth while to live,
Let all be now forgiven, and forgive.

– Alfred Austin

Benediction

As we go into the world may we recognise what needs to be forgiven and where we need to ask for forgiveness. May the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon us and with all those we love, today, tomorrow and for evermore. Amen

Announcements

Sunday worship, in the church, lasts for about 30 minutes. If you are a member of New Kilpatrick Church, you will have received information explaining how to book a pew, as there is space for only 50 people. Everyone must wear a mask, be socially distanced, and we are not able to sing. There are a whole lot of things to consider so please read the information before phoning the church office on 0141 942 8827 to book a space. I know that is a strange thing to do, but it is the only way we can stay within the government guidelines and keep everyone as safe as possible.

However, even with an actual service taking place you will still find us here or online at nkchurch.org.uk where you can engage with us in different ways. The church website and bulletin will keep you updated with all the latest news and projects that New Kilpatrick are engaging in.

A special thank you to Roddy Hamilton and Jane Gordon, who shared in our time together to make this podcast. Next week, we are moving out into the vineyard and a fair price for a day's wage. So why not come along and join us. In person and on here.

Music