**Greenmount URC – Sunday 13th September 2020, 10am**

**Notices: Elder on duty**

**Music played by the organist/pianist as people come in**

**Opening Words**

Friends welcome to worship here at Greenmount URC this morning. I am the Revd Richard Bradley and along with Revd Daniel Harris I am one of the ministers in the Missional Partnership. It is a day of firsts today…it is my first service that I have done in a church in front of a congregation since lockdown! I am usually looking into an empty church or room when I record…so it is nice to be with people!

The second ‘first’ is that this is the service that has been pre-recorded and is available on YouTube as well as e delivering it life. So, if you are so moved you can watch it all over again at home this afternoon!

Our opening words today come from Romans 12:1-2:-

**“1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”** (NIV)

Friends we gather in these strange times to praise and worship God! We come to offer ourselves afresh to God and seek more of Him in our lives.

We come to God in prayer….

**Prayers of Adoration**

God of mercy and God of grace, known to us in Jesus Christ we come before you this morning to bring you the praise and worship that you deserve. May the words we share today in this place of worship, or as we watch in our homes, speak of our love for you and our longing to know you more.

We thank and praise you that throughout lockdown many things changed and continue to be different but you are the constant and dependable God who is always with us in each and every situation. We thank you that worship of you has never ceased and never will cease despite what we might experience.

We come and offer ourselves afresh today in worship bringing you all that we are and all that we have. Challenge us and comfort through our time together in your presence as we read and explore your words contained in the Bible.

We offer al our prayers in and through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

**Bible Reading 1: Genesis 50:15-20 (NIV) - Joseph reassures his brothers**

15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?’ 16 So they sent word to Joseph, saying, ‘Your father left these instructions before he died: 17 “This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.” Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.’ When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. ‘We are your slaves,’ they said.

19 But Joseph said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.’ And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Thanks be to God for His Word.

**Reflection: Forgiveness Part 1**

I have a question for you…(it might have to be rhetorical as I am not sure I can have you shouting out)

Q: “What have Jason Donovan, Philip Schofield and Donny Osmond got in common?”

A: They have all played Joseph in the musical Joseph and his amazing technicolour dreamcoat!

I always think of that musical when I read the Genesis narrative about Jacob, Joseph and his brothers.

In the Lectionary Reading for today we hear of the climax to the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis chapter 50. Jacob the father has died and the brothers are concerned that Joseph might have been waiting for this moment in time to unleash punishment on his brothers for selling him into slavery and lying to their father saying he had been killed by wild animals!

In verse 17 we hear the words **“Joseph wept”** he did so because I think he felt sad that his brothers had been concerned that Joseph may not have forgiven them for their wrongdoing – not just any wrongdoing but something quite disturbing! There was probably sadness at the death of his father also.

And what struck me whilst preparing this reflection was that centuries later when Jesus on hearing that Lazarus had died in John 11:35 we read these two words: **“Jesus wept”** (NIV)

He wept because their was a physical loss (death) of his friends Lazarus. And hear Joseph wept because his brothers had underestimated the love their brother had for them! For Joseph it is like he had never remembered their evil intent – indeed Joseph in verses 19 & 20 said: **“19 But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good….””** (NIV)

Joseph’s brothers may have lived for many years with guilt over what they had done and how they had acted towards Joseph and their father, Jacob. And yet it seems it is as if Joseph had forgotten all about their evil intent!

And for that to happen God needs to be at work in our lives for we need to hear that we are forgiven! And we can be set free from guilt about what we might have done, said or thought.

*I wonder are there things in your life where you need to hear God’s forgiveness?*

*Are there times when you have said, done or thought things that have caused injury to others or yourself?*

*When you confess it may be that you need to hear the words of God saying – “you are forgiven”.*

Friends when we truly confess our sins to God it is as if they are totally obliterated and wiped from God’s memory.

We not only need to hear God’s words: “You are forgiven” but we need to know them and accept them in our hearts as truth.

Let us pray…

**Prayers Confession inc. The Lord’s Prayer**

In 1 John 1:9 we read these powerful words: **“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all righteousness.”** (NRSV)

Lord, we thank you and praise you that only through the death and resurrection of Jesus can our sins be truly and fully forgiven. We thank you for the cross and all that Christ did for us and bore for us on the cross. We acknowledge our weakness and frailty and in a moment of quiet we think of those times when we might have thought…said…or done things that have caused pain and injury to others or self and always to you – in a moment of quiet we bring our own prayers……

Lord may we hear you speak words of forgiveness as spoken in Hebrews 8:12 (NRSV) -   
**“For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”**

Amen.

**Music (YouTube video): God forgave my sin in Jesus’ name (verse 1, chorus, verse 2, chorus)**

We now sing/listen to the words of the hymn: God forgave my sin in Jesus’ name….

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| 1. God forgave my sin in Jesus' name;   I've been born again in Jesus' name,  and in Jesus' name I come to you  to share His love as He told me to. | 1. All power is given in Jesus' name   in earth and heaven in Jesus' name;  and in Jesus' name I come to you  to share His love as He told me to. |
| *Chorus: He said, 'Freely, freely you have received,*  *freely, freely give;*  *go in my name*  *and because you believe,*  *others will know that I live.'* | Carol Owens  ©1972 Bud John Songs.....  ccli 169737  Streaming licence 595811 |

**Bible Reading 2: Matthew 18:21-35 (NIV) - The Parable of the unmerciful servant**

**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**‘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 gold 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. 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.’

Thanks be to God for His Word.

**Reflection: Forgiveness Part 2**

Here are two more rhetorical questions….and it is not about musical theatre this time!

Q: How hard do you find it to say “sorry” to someone for something you have done wrong?

It can be really difficult to say sorry when we have done wrong. It means we have to swallow our pride, we may have to overcome some embarrassment because of what we have said or done.

The second question is: How hard do you find it to say, “I forgive you”? That can be equally as difficult and challenging as saying “sorry” for something we have done wrong.

I find this can be difficult in the case of a family member being hurt by someone - especially if it is one of my children that has been hurt! Knowing in my heart I need to forgive the offender can be tough!

When it comes to the NT reading, we see again Jesus giving a masterclass in story-telling as he so often did throughout his life and ministry! A story that cuts to the quick about slaves and masters.

And sometimes we fall fowl of detaching ourselves from the Biblical texts - of looking at, or reading, the text as if an outsider looking in on a scene. Passing judgment on what we are reading.

And yet, Jesus, invites us into the text so that we can place ourselves in the narrative.

How often are you like the person(s) in the Biblical text! In this case the servant owes his master 10,000 talents (a huge sum of money – literally millions in today’s money!) this servant never had a chance of paying it back to his master. It was a debt that he would have had for the rest of his days. And yet it was wiped off by his master! As if the debt was never accumulated.

* And the servant of course left the room/house and immediately went to his wife and told her the great news that the weight of debt was lifted and they could party! (I know what you’re thinking - that is not what the text says!)
* No, misread that, he left the room/house and immediately looked out a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller debt and told him his debt was cleared?!
* Of course, both of those readings are wrong! The slave who had been released from a great debt pounced on a servant lower down the pecking order and demanded he pay back a much lesser debt.

When he couldn’t pay the debt back there and then, the more senior servant pulled rank and threw him into prison until he could pay the debt.

What a shocking story…still a further shock when we can place ourselves squarely in the narrative not as some objective observer…but as a person in the story.

Friends, this passage challenges us to think about who we might need to forgive for the wrong they have done to us.

Like Joseph forgave his brothers, like God has forgiven us…so we are called to forgive those who “sin against us”.

May God, in Jesus Christ, through the power and transforming presence of the Holy Spirit give us strength and power to forgive those who do wrong to us.

Let us pray….

**Prayers for others**

Loving God whose love is available to all – we come before you bringing our prayers for others.

**We pray for your world:**

\*we pray for those who living in poverty, those who are homeless, those who are hungry, those who are thirsty, those who are trafficked, used and abused. We pray for a fair sharing of the world’s resources. We pray that you would release from captivity those abused by traffickers.

We pray for the whole of humankind would be challenged to look after your planet in a kinder way.

**We pray for your church:**

We pray that despite the pandemic your church would continue to be a place of light and love, of grace and mercy, of challenge and comfort. We pray for the URC as it seeks to be relevant in an ever-changing world. We pray for our Synod and for the Missional Partnerships in our Synod. We pray churches and ministers would rise to the challenge of ministering differently and working together to further the kingdom of God.

**We pray for ourselves and those who we love:**

Lord we pray for those we love who are in need at this time. For those struggling with ill health whether of body, mind or spirit. We pray for your healing to work in them and your presence to be with them. We think of people for whom we are concerned in our own church(es) in a moment of stillness we lift them to the Lord *….(pause)….*

And we pray for ourselves. Draw us ever closer to your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. We pray for a fresh outpouring of your Holy Spirit on us as we continue on our journey of faith.

May we be bold in sharing our faith so that others may come to know Jesus.

We offer all our prayers in and through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

**Music (YouTube video): Draw me close to you**

Having prayed that we would be drawn close to God we now listen to a song that will probably be new to you. It is a song called “draw me close to you” I hope these words speak powerfully to you as we close our act of worship.

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| Verse:  Draw me close to You,  never let me go,  I lay it all down again,  to hear You say that I'm Your friend.  You are my desire  No one else will do,  'cause nothing else could take Your place,  to feel the warmth of Your embrace.  Help me find the way,  bring me back to You. | *Chorus:*  *You're all I want*  *You're all I've ever needed*  *You're all I want*  *Help me know You are near.* |
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**Blessing:**

We began the service with some words from Romans 12 and we draw this service to a close using words from Romans 12….

**“9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.”** (NIV)

May God go with us in the week that lies before us. May we place Christ at the centre of all we are and all we do and may we be filled with the Holy Spirit as we grow in faith, Amen.

**Music played by the organist/pianist as people leave**