

# **Traditional Home Service**

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September**

## **OPENING PRAYER**

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love; grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; 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 forever.  
Amen.

## **PRAYER OF PENITENCE**

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## **PRAISE**

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ.  
Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:  
Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.  
Open our lips, Lord:  
and we shall praise your name.

## **HYMN 1** (And Can it Be)

**READINGS** – Romans 14.1-12  
Matthew 18.21-35

## **TALK**

## **CREED**

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

*Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.*

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

## **HYMN 2** (Nothing But the Blood)

## **CONCLUSION**

The Lord bless you and watch over you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace;  
and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.  
Amen.

## HYMNS TO USE

### 1. And Can it Be

And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Savior's blood  
Died He for me who caused His pain  
For me who Him to death pursued  
Amazing love how can it be  
That Thou my God shouldst die for me  
Amazing love how can it be  
That Thou my God shouldst die for me

He left His Father's throne above  
So free so infinite His grace  
Emptied Himself of all but love  
And bled for Adam's helpless race  
'Tis mercy all immense and free  
For O my God it found out me  
'Tis mercy all immense and free  
For O my God it found out me

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray  
I woke the dungeon flamed with light  
My chains fell off my heart was free  
I rose went forth and followed Thee  
My chains fell off my heart was free  
I rose went forth and followed Thee

No condemnation now I dread  
Jesus and all in Him is mine  
Alive in Him my living Head  
And clothed in righteousness divine  
Bold I approach th'eternal throne  
And claim the crown through Christ my  
own  
Bold I approach th'eternal throne  
And claim the crown through Christ my  
own

### 2. Nothing But the Blood

What can wash away my sin  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus  
What can make me whole again  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

*O precious is the flow  
That makes me white as snow  
No other fount I know  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus*

For my pardon this I see  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus  
For my cleansing this my plea  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

Nothing can for sin atone  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus  
Naught of good that I have done  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

This is all my hope and peace  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus  
This is all my righteousness  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

## TALK – Matthew 18.21-35: The Challenge of Forgiveness

In our Gospel reading for today, we find Peter wrestling with the challenge of forgiveness. He is trying to work out how many times is an appropriate number of times to have to forgive someone – is there a limit for forgiveness? Perhaps it's seven times? But as Jesus explains, we shouldn't keep score when it comes to forgiveness. God is always generous in extending forgiveness towards us. God's grace and mercy has no limit. And so, we must do the same when it comes to forgiving others.

To help demonstrate his point, Jesus tells the parable we just heard about a servant who owed the King a lot of money but couldn't afford to pay off his debt. The servant begs the King for mercy, and the King generously cancels the debt. But although the servant experiences mercy from the King, he fails to show the same mercy to a friend who owes him a sum of money. The servant has his friend thrown in prison until he can pay the servant back his money. The King catches wind of this and is very angry at the servant for not showing mercy to others. As a consequence, the King undoes his cancelling of the original debt and throws the servant in prison until he can repay the King. Jesus warns us that this is how God will treat us, unless we forgive others sincerely from our hearts.

This is heavy stuff! But it's also really important...forgiveness is at the very heart of Jesus's teaching, and learning to forgive as God has forgiven us is an essential aspect of what it means to live as a follower of Jesus. When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, he said we should pray that God would 'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'. We pray that every Sunday, don't we...many of us pray it every day. It

reminds us that *being* forgiven and *giving* forgiveness go hand in hand. If we want to know God's forgiveness, we've got to show it to others.

But as I'm sure many of us have experienced, real and proper forgiveness is not always easy! Especially when we feel hurt, or angry or betrayed. And proper forgiveness is usually not just a one-off decision – it's an ongoing choice. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, 'forgiveness is a constant attitude'. We've got to keep on choosing the way of forgiveness.

And we all need forgiveness – none of us are perfect, we all get things wrong in our relationships with each other, and with God. God knows that and he still loves us unconditionally – no matter how much we mess up, when we ask for mercy God is always generous in showing us forgiveness. He just asks that we also show that same generosity in forgiving others.

The reality is, every time we refuse to forgive someone or withhold forgiveness, we usually end up hurting ourselves more than the other person. But when we choose to forgive, we share something of the love and grace that God has shown us. We grow more into the people God created us to be.

The kind of forgiveness that Jesus calls us to is not wishy washy. It's not about pretending we're not hurt or denying there's a problem. It's not about staying in situations that our bad for us. Real forgiveness goes deeper than just the idea of 'forgive and forget'. So, we don't use forgiveness as an excuse to ignore or dismiss a very real problem that might need addressing. Sometimes confrontation is needed, but only if it's driven by a desire for forgiveness and reconciliation, rather than out of spite or revenge. But the kind of forgiveness Jesus speaks about is freely given

– even if the person who has wronged us hasn't apologised or even admitted there's a problem. Real forgiveness is freely given, not earned – and God has given us the gift of his Holy Spirit to help us do it.

For me, one of the hardest things I've had to forgive is something someone did to hurt me over 10 years ago. And this person has never apologised to me. I found that hard – they never really took responsibility for what they did. But that doesn't mean I shouldn't forgive them. It took me around a year to begin to deal with the pain of my hurt in a way that meant I could even start to forgive this person. And at first it was really hard – I kept taking back my forgiveness and clinging to how wrong I thought the person had been. Several times a day I would have to choose to forgive this person. And because this person never apologised to me, all my pain and unforgiveness would come up in my relationship with God. It made me feel trapped. And the truth was, my unforgiveness was hurting me way more than the other person who was happily carrying on with their life. But over time, and with lots of prayer and help from God, I came to a place where I was ready and able to forgive the person that hurt me. It was definitely a process – not a one-off magical moment of forgiveness. But it brought me so much freedom and healing in my own heart when I was able to choose to forgive this person.

Theologian Tom Wright says that forgiveness is a bit like the air in our lungs – there's only room for us to inhale the next lungful when we've just breathed out the previous one. If we insist on withholding it, refusing to give someone the kiss of life that they really need, we won't be able to take in any more air, and we'll suffocate. That's a bit like how I felt when I couldn't forgive the person who had hurt me. It was keeping me prisoner,

stopping me from breathing. But choosing to forgive can bring us freedom and healing. And when we are open and willing and able to forgive others, we also become more open to receiving God's love and forgiveness for ourselves. And that is only ever good for us.

So, as we come into land, let's take a moment to pause and reflect:  
How easy do we find it to forgive those who hurt us?

What stops us from saying 'sorry' or 'I forgive you'?

Is there a person or a situation where we need to choose to forgive?

Perhaps there's something that feels too big or too hard to forgive right now. But maybe we're in a place where we could say we *want* to forgive, or even that we want to *want to* forgive. Talk to God about that. Pray about those feelings. That's an important step in itself, and God is patient in helping us learn to forgive, even if it takes a while.

As Jesus told Peter, there is no limit to how many times we should forgive those who wrong us. Forgiveness is freely given and not earned. In Jesus, God offers us unlimited forgiveness when we ask him for it, and none of us truly deserve that. And so, as we receive God's gracious, generous forgiveness, let us not be like the servant in the story who refused to show mercy to others even when they had experienced such mercy from the King. As we live as God's forgiven people, with the help of his Holy Spirit, let us be generous in showing that same forgiveness to others.

Let's pray...