

Sermon for Trinity 14 Baldock 130920

Romans 14:1-12: Matthew 18:21-35

May I speak

Last time I was with you at St Mary's for a Sunday morning service it was Trinity 8, in early August. School holidays had only just begun. Here we are six weeks on: the new school year has just begun; students are returning to or beginning their time at university or college, many of them away from home for the first time. And much has changed for **all** of us in the UK and elsewhere in the world.

Today is Education Sunday, especially significant this year. We think of and pray for all children at school, their teachers and the other adults employed in schools - for their safety as they learn. Learn, not just English, maths and other subjects, but learn about the world and their part in it, about responsibility and respect and so on. And we pray too for the young adults continuing their education They will need to cope with COVID for themselves as they discover how to manage their budgets and their lives as they face new opportunities and decisions.

God will forgive me, that's his job. So writes the 19th century German poet Heinrich Heine. Well, yes, that's true but it's not only part of **God's** job but ours too. Peter said to Jesus: *How often should I forgive someone? As many as 7 times?* Seven you may remember is the perfect number, which signifies any number of times. But Jesus responds with: *Not seven times but 77 times, OR in some versions 70 X 7 times* meaning an unlimited number of times, umpteen times as my father used to say. In every Anglican service there is a prayer of confession and we receive God's forgiveness and we always say the Lord's Prayer including the words: *forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.* Forgiveness is important.

In today's gospel we are all urged to develop a forgiving nature. It's not a matter of how many **times** we should forgive, we should just **forgive**. And remember that when you and I forgive someone we not only release the person forgiven, we also release **ourselves**.

I want now to speak briefly about people in the news who have forgiven, sometimes for really serious or wicked actions.

Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu in South Africa in different ways forgave and didn't bear grudges as they moved to make progress in healing their nation.

Colin and Wendy Parry, parents of 12 year-old Tim who died after the bombing in Warrington in 1993, could not forgive those who planted the bomb- they were never identified. But they said they did not want to know who they were, they wanted to get on with their lives with their other two children. They have dedicated themselves since to developing a peace project in Warrington.

You may remember the name, Anthony Walker? He was an 18 year old murdered in Liverpool in 2015. His mother Gee and sister Dominique (20) spoke of their forgiveness of his attackers.

Dominique: Do I forgive them? At the point of dying Jesus said: *I forgive them because they do not know what they are doing.*

70 times 7 times we must forgive, that's what we were taught, that's what the Bible says; that's what we have to do. It's hard, it's very hard, but you get through it. Forgiving eases the bitterness and the anger, if you can wake up in the morning and think: Forgive, forgive, forgive.

Gee: I've got to forgive them. My family and I will stand by what we believe. Anthony was my prayer partner - we prayed together.

I can't hate. I brought up my children to love, to respect - to respect themselves and to respect others.

Martin Luther King Jr who was assassinated in 1968, expressed his belief in the importance of forgiveness in these words: *We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. If we are devoid of the power to forgive, we are devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the **worst** of us and there is some evil in the **best** of us. When we discover this we are less prone to hate our enemies.*

Father Michael Lapsley an anti-apartheid activist who in 1976 lost both hands and an eye when a letter bomb exploded tells us how difficult but how worthwhile it can be to forgive: *Forgiveness is not glib and cheap and easy. it may take a long time, it's not just words, it's a tough thing to do. Forgiveness can be costly, painful and difficult but when it happens, it can also be a key to extraordinary things.*

Our readings today tell of the generosity and grace of God, sometimes mediated directly and sometimes through us. On Education Sunday we should remind ourselves that education is always a two way process. We know from St Francis that **it is in giving that we receive**, and today's readings teach that **in forgiving we are forgiven** and any of us involved with children and education know that **in teaching we learn**.

If we want to be a part of God's Kingdom we need to embrace the chance to be a learning people. In our children and young people we have both hope and opportunity. **Pray for them.**

Amen.

From the pulpit I also spoke briefly about The Forgiveness Project.
www.theforgivenessproject.com

Some of my final remarks are based on material provided for Education Sunday 2020.