

The Lord's Prayer

8: As we forgive those who sin against us.

Welcome and Opening Prayer

In the last session we looked at asking forgiveness for ourselves. In this session we are going to think about asking forgiveness for those who have hurt us. Both these callings can be tough and challenging but again we remember that forgiveness is at the very heart of the prayer because forgiveness was at the centre of Jesus's life and death. Forgiveness is not about ignoring wrongdoing but about restoring good, wholesome and flourishing relationships.

Some questions in twos before sharing, if you are able to, with the whole group: *These are big questions. Please only share what you feel comfortable sharing. Forgiving others can be one of the biggest challenges a person faces in their life. Some hurts are quite trivial and easy to "brush off" but some are so deep that they change lives forever and how we live with the call to forgive can be very challenging.*

- Why do you think forgiving others and praying for forgiveness is so important to Jesus that he has this at the heart of the prayer he taught?
- What are the challenges we find, or might find, when it comes to forgiving others?
- How easy or difficult do we find the calling to forgive? What should we do if we find forgiving too difficult?

We are going to look at some bible passages now. Some of these are quite challenging in what they are calling us to do and how we are to live. It's good to approach these passages with real honesty and to acknowledge if we find the teaching difficult. But, also, to explore the kind of society and community these passages are encouraging and how we feel about that. The first passage is from St Matthew's Gospel and forms part of Jesus's great sermon on the mount. The questions at the end may help you to reflect on the passage.

Matthew 5.38-48

‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- How do you respond to this passage as a whole?
- How do you react to Jesus’s teaching about turning the other cheek? Why do you think this was so important to Jesus?
- How do we love our enemies? Can we do it and does it mean we shouldn’t resist evil?
- What do you think Jesus is hoping for as he teaches these things, which must have been so hard to hear?

The next passage is also from St Matthew’s Gospel. We need to remember that for many people and many cultures it is not forgiveness that is important but vengeance, or at the very least ex-communication. Here Peter is being taught that the calling to forgive is boundless. But what do you make of the parable?

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 should 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 should 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.'

- How do you respond to the passage as a whole?
- How do you respond to Jesus telling Peter to forgive 77 times (or, effectively, without limit)?
- What are your responses to the parable? What, if anything, does it teach about our responsibility to be people who forgive?

The next passage is not directly about forgiveness but the call to forgiveness is very much present beneath the surface.

Romans 12.9-end

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty,

give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- How do you respond to this passage and what sort of community do you think St Paul is trying to encourage?
- **Love** and **Bless** are prominent words in this passage but how do we love and bless those who persecute or hurt us?

*The final passage is from St Luke’s Gospel and forms part of his crucifixion narrative. Rather than study this passage please read it and then keep some silence together. During the silence perhaps you can reflect on your journeys to forgiveness. It is important to remember that sometimes forgiveness may seem impossible but, in such cases, perhaps our prayer needs to be “Lord, help me to **begin** to forgive.” In this way we commit ourselves to the journey, and, perhaps, open ourselves to the healing that brings.*

Luke 23.32 - 43

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Jesus. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding Jesus and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

A time for Silence

Closing Prayer