**2020-09-13 Sue Diggory**

**Trinity 14 - The Challenge of Forgiveness**

**Matthew 18 21 - 35**

I wonder if forgiveness something you find easy to do, especially if you are being asked to forgive the same things over and over again?

*‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’*

Peter thought he was being over generous; and I suspect we would feel the same, Peter thought being willing to forgive the same wrong as many as seven times was more than should be required of him under the law, but as is so often the case Jesus had other ideas;

And then as he often did Jesus told a story, but not just a simple story but a parable, a story that had a sting in the tail, and if we go back to the start of the story we will find out how this will help us to understand Jesus’ 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.*

Ten thousand talents was an outrageous amount of money, worth many billions in today’s money.

*So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”*

And we are told that the king had pity on him and released him from this vast debt. He chose to have and show compassion, to release the slave from his obligation and in doing so to show compassion on his family as well. And after this amazing act of selfless generosity all should have been well, but as the story unfolds, we quickly see that this is not the case.

*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.”*

A denarius was standard pay for a day’s wages, and the debt we are looking at here was 100 denarii, not much more than three months’ wages, yet the reaction here was very different when the fellow-slave pleaded his case, when his fellow-slave asked for exactly the same as he had done earlier, simply for time to pay.

*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.*

And so the story unfolds and we hear that the king intervenes –

*And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt.*

And finally, Jesus concludes the parable with a stern and hard to hear warning -

*So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’*

I began today by wondering how easy you find saying sorry – perhaps you remember as a child be made to apologise for something that to you seemed very unfair, for something that you hadn’t actually done or for something that you really didn’t feel at all sorry for as you stood there and just said ‘sorree’ only to be told to go away and think about it and come back when you were prepared say it again in a way that showed you meant it!

Forgiving is a basic requirement for all Christians and perhaps one of the reasons Christianity is not always popular – we can sometimes be seen to be ‘a soft touch,’ but as we all know being willing to forgive is so often far from being the easy option or a ‘soft touch.

But we are ALL called to forgive so that we in turn can be forgiven by God ‘forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us’ we will be saying those words together once again in a few minutes as we prepare to receive from God the one who in the words of the Psalmist is prepared to forgive us *12as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.*

Are we, am I, at times are we more like the man in our Gospel reading; the wicked slave who would not forgive the minor debt owed to him even after he himself had been forgiven much.

Peter’s question and Jesus’ answer at the beginning of our Gospel reading really do sum up it all up – if you are still counting how many times you’ve forgiven someone, you’re not really forgiving them at all, your simply postponing revenge. Seventy times seven is a rather teasing reply from Jesus – it is very much a don’t bother counting just do it or to go back to my childhood its making sure you are saying sorry and not sorree!

Perhaps at this time when we are all spending more than usual at home with rather more empty than full diaries it might be good to take some time to reflect on whether or not we need to have a ‘saying sorry’ session not only with God but with some of our family and friends as well.

Amen