

**SERVICE OF WORSHIP FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL  
CONGREGATIONS. (13<sup>th</sup> September 2020)**

Welcome/Introduction:

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also, with you.**

Acknowledgement of traditional custodians of the land:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of the land in which we live, work and worship. To the members and elders of the Yorta Yorta nation past, present and emerging.

Call to worship:

Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord; praise the name of the Lord.

Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore.

From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised.

The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. (Psalm 113; 1-4)

Let worship God.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, by your Holy Spirit, be present with us now.

**Amen.**

Hymn: 155 (TiS) 'O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and confession:

O God of love: who created us; who continually preserves and sustains us; who has loved us with an everlasting love and given us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. We praise you and adore you.

Merciful God, you have set forth the way of life for us in your beloved Son.

We confess with shame our slowness to learn of him, our failure to follow him, our reluctance to bear the cross.

We confess the poverty of our worship, our neglect of the Christian community and of the means of grace, our hesitating witness for Christ, our evasion of responsibilities in your service, our imperfect stewardship of your creation.

**Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us. Amen.**

Declaration of forgiveness:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Hear then Christ's word of grace to us: Your sins are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God.**

Doxology: 771 (TiS)

Reading: Mathew 18: 21-35

Message: 'Forgiving is tough'

Forgiving is not easy. Every Sunday we pray for forgiveness of our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. In our creed we say 'we believe in the forgiveness of sins'.

Do we believe what we pray or are we just praying it to hide our reluctance to forgive?

There are many who have worked out ways of hiding their unforgiving lives because it is tough.

There's a story of two men who were pillars of their community. No one did more for the community than they did. There was something strange about these two men. You see, with all the good works they were doing for the community, they had not spoken to each other for over ten years. In other words, they had found a way of disguising their difficulty in forgiving.

In all those years, they had spoken to each other and they would not even look at each other. If they ended up in the same room, one would leave.

Many people would use their good works to hide their reluctance to forgive.

Another way of avoiding having to forgive someone is to leave. This happens a lot in church. If I can't forgive a certain person or if I'm unwilling to forgive that person then I would leave the church. Because they know in their heart, they could not forgive that person.

And, there is always the 'exception'. We hear what Jesus is saying about forgiveness, but there are exceptions. If the injustice done against us is too great, then we should not be expected to forgive especially if the injustice is being done repeatedly.

We believe that if we keep forgiving then we are simply encouraging the perpetrators.

Peter's question is important for us, for we have wondered at one time or another whether Jesus is serious about forgiving the way he taught.

Peter asked about the limit to forgiving. He had done his maths. It was the tradition in those days that you could forgive a person three times. That seem reasonable, but he took that number and multiplied it by two then add one, and he came up with the number of completeness.

"Lord, how many times should I forgive? Seven times?" Jesus said to him, "No! Seven times seventy", which is a way of saying...ALWAYS FORGIVE!

Then Jesus went on to tell the parable of the severe though merciful landowner. His servant owed him ten thousand talents. Put it simply, the servant owed the landowner everything. The servant begged for mercy and forgiveness and was given. The landowner wrote off the debt but then things changed.

The servant goes forth from being forgiven and find someone who owed him a hundred talents. Not ten thousand but a hundred talents. He did not forgive him; in fact, he came down hard on him the bible says.

The Lord heard about what had happened and summoned the ungrateful servant and said to him, "You wicked servant/slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" In anger, the lord handed him over to be tortured until he repays his full debt.

We may say that the landlord was severe in his punishment, but we get the message of what Jesus is trying to teach Peter and us about forgiveness.

The reality is that we punish ourselves; we cut ourselves off from the grace of God when we don't forgive. And yes, it is not the person who needs our forgiveness who has the most difficult time. We are.

To receive the mercy and grace of God we are able to extend that mercy and grace to others. This is why we ask for forgiveness. We ask for forgiveness because we are already forgiven. We pray that in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us".

People who are able to forgive have received grace and mercy and are able to build productive lives. Our lives become smaller and weaker if we are not willing to forgive.

Dr. M. Scott Peck, a psychiatrist, says in *The Road Less Travelled*, that unless we are able to at least move toward the work of forgiving the person, even the person who does not deserve our forgiveness, there will not be mental health. There won't be spiritual health either.

Lastly, forgiving is liberating. It may be tough, but It frees us up from the bondage of being slave to the person who needs our forgiveness.

In an epitaph in a cemetery, a woman had inscribed on the tomb of her adulterous husband the words "Gone but not forgiven." We don't want that to be our epitaph. We want to be free by forgiving. We would do it seventy times seven for there is no limit to the mercy and grace that flows freely into our lives when we forgive.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Notices: Lorraine Threlfall

Offering:

Prayers of the people:

Hymn: 158 (TiS) 'God has spoken by his prophets'.

Blessing: 782 (TiS) 'Go now in peace'.