

Morning Prayer 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

Service with Peter Widdess



Personal preparation before the service begins.  
Please take time to remember where you are,  
and why you are here.  
Give thanks and become still in the presence of God.

Prelude

Grace, mercy and peace  
from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ  
be with you.

**And also with you**

This is the day that the Lord has made.

**Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

♪♪

All people that on earth do dwell,  
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.  
Serve him with joy, his praises tell,  
come now before him and rejoice!

Know that the Lord is God indeed;  
he formed us all without our aid.  
We are the flock he surely feeds,  
the sheep who by his hand were made.

O enter then his gates with joy,  
within his courts his praise proclaim!  
Let thankful songs your tongues employ.  
O bless and magnify his name!

Because the Lord our God is good,  
his mercy is forever sure.

His faithfulness at all times stood  
and shall from age to age endure.

CCLI Song # 82096

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We pray with words from Psalm 103

The Lord is compassionate and gracious,  
**slow to anger, abounding in love.**

He will not always accuse,

**nor will he harbour his anger forever;**

he does not treat us as our sins deserve

**or repay us according to our iniquities.**

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

**so great is his love for those who fear him;**

as far as the east is from the west,

**so far has he removed our transgressions from**

**us.**

As a father has compassion on his children,

**so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; ...**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit,

**As it was in the beginning,  
is now and shall be for ever.**

A collect for today:

Almighty God,  
whose only Son has opened for us  
a new and living way into your presence:  
give us pure hearts and steadfast wills  
to worship you in spirit and in truth;  
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.

The reading is taken from Romans 14:1-12

Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God

**Our hearts and our minds are open**

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written:

“As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,  
‘every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

The reading is taken from Matthew 18:21-35

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

**Glory to you, O Lord**

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had

mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### Homily

The combination between the readings and today's psalm is reflection on sin and forgiveness in combination with identity, compassion and grace. That sounds like a mouthful of problems, but I will start with a short story.

It is 1975. The Ethiopian army has overthrown the emperor Haile Selassie and declared a Marxist revolution. All students together with the 11th and 12th classes in schools are sent on the "Zemetcha". Equipped with uniforms supplied by Cuba, they are sent in groups into villages all over Ethiopia to teach the villagers reading, writing and simple sums. My student Bekelle reported: we were a group of 20 students, 10 Christian and 10 Muslims. Our first problem was how to kill chickens for our food. The Christians slaughter in the name of the trinity, and the Muslims in the name of Allah. We all refused to eat from the chickens slaughtered in the wrong way. The solution was easy – we slaughtered in the name of the revolution.

The story has a very bitter ending with the death of most of the students at the hands of the villagers – age and tradition against youth and (blind) enthusiasm.

In this story we are in the midst of a clash between faith and identity, religious, social and political, a clash full of tension, the fear of losing the ground beneath our feet, and between weakness and strength.

In other words we are in the situation in Rome at the time when Paul was writing to the Christians there. In the year 45 the emperor Claudius had driven the large Jewish community out of Rome. Most of the Christians in Rome were Jews. Some years later when the Jews were able to return to Rome, the Jewish Christians found that the majority of the Christians in Rome were no longer Jews, but rather of gentile origin. The change of majorities is challenging and threatening for those returning. In Romans chapter 14 and 15 Paul is dealing with the issues and conflicts which have arisen within the Christian community between these two groups. In today's reading he deals with questions of identity caused by diet: I prefer to be vegetarian because most meat is not slaughtered according to the Jewish rules of hygiene, and in the second case - holy days: I understand the first book of the Torah tells me to keep the Sabbath as a holy day and you gentiles don't.

Both groups within the Christian community in Rome feels themselves to be true to the gospel, and their faith as being the only true way to live as a Christian. There is the language of weakness of faith by the others. There is the accusation of contempt for those who think differently. Such conflicts along the tension line between legalism and liberty are emotional and can easily lead to violence in the name of truth. The actual issues in Rome are perhaps not so relevant for us, but we can see the same mechanisms throughout the history of the church: the conflicts between the orthodox and the western church, the wars and theological rhetoric around the reformation which continue for example in Northern Ireland, or the conflicts between the traditional and charismatic churches in Brazil. The "others" are always weak in their faith and bound up in the tradition from the past. I alone, with other right thinking people, am true to Christ.

And what does Paul say?

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

Paul sees the conflict in Rome in the greater context of his whole letter. In chapters 1-8 Paul had developed his understanding of our salvation through the death of Christ on the cross. He argues that God accepts and sees us as his children, not because of our great deeds, good works or correct understanding of theological debates, but simply because God loves us so much that in the person of Jesus he takes all our misdeeds, our weaknesses, identity crises, contempt and whatever else threatens to divide us from other people onto to the cross, and dies.

The resurrection is the invitation to live in the risen Christ, to have faith in him. The question of the strength or weakness of our faith is irrelevant for Paul: he writes - For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord.

Paul is teaching us to learn to accept each other as brother and sister in Christ. This is a picture of the love of God, which doesn't look whether the object of love, the loved person, is good, nice, bad or evil. Our psalm tells us of God's compassion and grace as the free gifts of God. The gospel reminds us there is no limit to the readiness for forgiveness. The parable of the unjust steward places our forgiveness in the context of our brothers and sisters. The steward is an important and powerful person in the household of the king, but he is not special. Jesus reminds us: God has forgiven you and so you can forgive others, live in acceptance and love with everyone.



Turn our hearts  
Turn our hearts to one another  
Let your kindness show  
Where our words or deeds have wounded  
Let forgiveness flow  
Turn our hearts

Turn our hearts  
Turn our hearts from pride and anger  
To your ways of peace  
For you died and shed your blood  
That enmity may cease  
Turn our hearts

Turn our hearts  
As we all have been forgiven  
So must we forgive  
As we all have found acceptance  
So let us receive  
Turn our hearts, change our hearts  
Join our hearts, turn our hearts

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### Intercessions (by Klaus)

Lord our God

You have opened for us a new and living way into your  
presence through the life and death of your Son our  
Lord Jesus Christ

Who did not consider equality with God something to  
be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

Lord Jesus, forgive me for my arrogance my pride  
sitting on the high horse, knowing so much better than  
all the others what is right and wrong, even sometimes  
in your name

Teach me your humility, teach me your obedience to  
your father's will

Help me to overcome my pride, help me to understand  
the brokenness in me and the beauty I have in you

*Response:*

Lord Jesus I acknowledge that you are Lord over my life and death

Turn my heart and let your loving kindness show.

Lord, forgiveness is not always easy, especially when we are hurt. So often we wait for the other to apologize to do the first move so that we graciously can accept the apologies. Not so with you, you came into this world while we were still sinners. You prayed for us to be forgiven while we were nailing you to the cross. Lord, let me seek more of you in my life since I am not able to accomplish what you can do. Thank you for your promise that we can through you. It is not our love for you but that you loved us and sent your son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins and shortcomings; your promise that if we love one another, that you will live in us and your love is made complete in us. If we claim to love God yet hate our brother or sister we are liars. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. Lord thank you that we can rely on the Love you have for us. Help us to trust and come into the presence of your love.

*Response:*

Lord Jesus I acknowledge that you are Lord over my life and death

Turn my heart and let your loving kindness show.

Lord, for many of us it is hard to forgive ourselves. We cannot see the beauty of Your creation in us, but only failure, misfit for this life, unlovable and expelled from the society. Condemnation turns our life into darkness and there seems no light at the end of the tunnel. Lord I pray that you show your light which no darkness can be dark enough that it can swallow it. Let your light give hope and self-worth to all who are struggling to walk upright, Lord let us as a community come along side and bring new hope through your presence in our hands and arms wrapped around the vulnerable and hurt. Let us find words of encouragement, your words which will set prisoners free, blind see and lame walk.

Let the paralysis by the burden of judgment be lifted of their shoulders. Let Your grace fill their hearts and minds.

*Response:*

Lord Jesus I acknowledge that you are Lord over my life and death

Turn my heart and let your loving kindness show.

Lord, we pray for our church. Let it be a place where forgiveness is not a foreign word, but loving care be practiced among each other so that Your kindness becomes visible and tangible. Lord, bless the church council and the Vision team with your thoughts and encourage all of us to step forward to rebuild your church.

Lord we pray and thank you for Peter Widdess and all the Locums who are helping us to walk close at your side during the interim time.

*Response:*

Lord Jesus I acknowledge that you are Lord over my life and death

Turn my heart and let your loving kindness show.

Lord, we pray for Your church worldwide, let unity and loving Kindness in your name be the witness of our faith, let this shine into all the corners of this world. Lord we pray for Christopher and his community in Canada, for Robin Stockitt and his community in Northern Ireland, we pray for all the churches worldwide and especially where they are persecuted for their faith, Lord let your presence be a powerful source of life.

*Response:*

Lord Jesus I acknowledge that you are Lord over my life and death

Turn my heart and let your loving kindness show.

Lord, let us share the love we experience from you every day when seeking your presence with the many people in our church who are going through a hard time. Let us pray for Margaret who is in the hospital,

Brian facing surgery, the many who are struggling with the current pandemic, let us pray...

*Response:*

Lord Jesus I acknowledge that you are Lord over my life and death

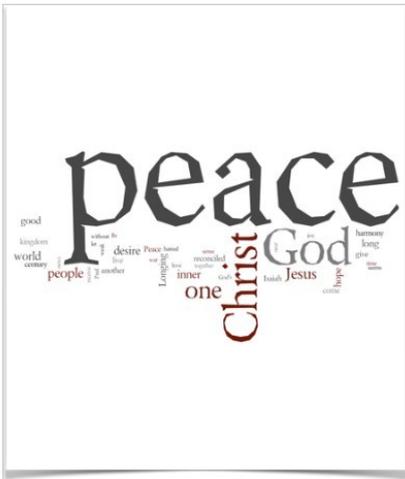
Turn my heart and let your loving kindness show.

Lord we pray all of this in your Son's name

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

In the language of our hearts, let us pray as our Saviour taught us .....



A sign of peace

We are all one in Christ Jesus.  
We belong to him through faith,  
heirs of the promise of the Spirit of peace.

We offer one another a sign of peace.

♪♪♪

Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
let me be as Christ to you.  
Pray that I may have the grace  
to let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey.  
fellow trav'lers on the road.  
We are here to help each other,  
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christlight for you  
in the night-time of your fear.  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
speak the peace you long to hear

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## Blessing

God the Father,  
by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead,  
strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life:  
And the blessing of God almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
come upon you and remain with you always.  
Amen

Go in the peace of Christ  
**Thanks be to God**

Postlude