

Haverhill Methodist Church

Worship at Home 13th September 2020 – Sarah Glasswell

Call to worship

We begin with words from Psalm 103:1-5, 20-22

- ¹ Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- ² Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits –
- ³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
- ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
- ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,
you his servants who do his will.

²² Praise the LORD, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the LORD, my soul.

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus we praise and worship you now, our creator, saviour, guide and friend.

You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords and we bow down before you in awe and wonder.

Be with us now as we spend time with you and with our church family whether far or near.

Amen

Hymn Praise my soul the King of Heaven

Talk

The reading for today is the parable of the unmerciful servant.

To understand a negative, you need to understand the positive, or the opposite. Before we come on to unmerciful, we need to be clear what mercy is.

Mercy and grace often go together. Mercy is not getting what you deserve and grace is getting what you don't deserve.

Mercy can be seen when someone deserves a punishment but doesn't get it. Imagine being pulled over whilst driving for going too fast. You deserve a fine or points on your licence, but you have a conversation with the police officer. It would probably be helpful to simply admit being in the wrong and apologise. They appreciate your honesty and let you go, with a quick 'don't do it again'. That's mercy.

Grace can be as simple as Tim and I giving Joe a few more minutes past his bedtime to finish watching a film, or to play for a bit longer with the children on the street. It can be as vast as God adopting us as his children, heirs to his kingdom when we have not done enough to earn it. More on that later!

Grace and mercy are the playing out of love ultimately, and forgiveness.

Song This is amazing grace

Who breaks the power of sin and darkness
Whose love is mighty and so much stronger
The King of Glory, the King above all kings
Who shakes the whole earth with holy thunder
And leaves us breathless in awe and wonder
The King of Glory, the King above all kings

This is amazing grace
This is unfailing love
That You would take my place
That You would bear my cross
You lay down Your life
That I would be set free
Oh, Jesus, I sing for
All that You've done for me

Who brings our chaos back into order
Who makes the orphan a son and daughter
The King of Glory, the King of Glory

Who rules the nations with truth and justice
Shines like the sun in all of its brilliance
The King of Glory, the King above all kings

This is amazing grace...

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain }
Worthy is the King who conquered the grave } X 4
Worthy, worthy, worthy

This is amazing grace...

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Reading Matthew 18:21-35 The parable of the unmerciful servant

Sermon

The benefit of reading a bible passage over and over, dwelling on it, is that questions form in your mind that you might not have ever considered. They might be significant, or maybe not, but you will enjoy having a moment where you realise you noticed something you didn't before. I love it when that happens, and in today's parable, I eventually had this thought, as I was writing this sermon.

Why on earth was a king lending 10,000 talents, the equivalent of millions of pounds, to a servant?! It is very possible that it is just the setting up of the story by Jesus to get us to where we need to be later on. But just thinking on the 'why' can help us delve deeper and see if there is anything significant hidden, waiting to be found.

If there is something in this, maybe the king is lending money, acting as a bank. Fair enough. But millions of pounds to a servant? It doesn't seem to make sense. My thought, and it is just a thought, but I am looking at this remembering it is a parable about the kingdom of God, is that the king lent more than made sense business-wise because he knew this man, and cared about him in some way. I'll leave you to consider that for yourselves, otherwise I'll be off on a tangent!

Jesus is telling this parable in response to Peter asking about forgiveness. Is 7 a reasonable number of times to forgive someone? Jesus blows that idea out of the water and replies with 77 times, and in some translations 77 times 7. This represents unending forgiveness. There should be no limit to our forgiveness, to showing mercy.

And so in the parable we have the king about to sell the man and his family as he can't pay. That would have been customary at the time, but a horrendous prospect for this family man. He begs for patience, more time to repay his impossible debt. The king's heart softens towards this servant and, knowing it could never be repaid, cancels the debt completely. There is no repayment plan and no spell in prison because he deserves punishment. This huge burden is lifted from the man, and off he goes. The king shows mercy towards him.

As this is a parable about the kingdom of heaven we know the king represents God and the servant is us.

When we do wrong, there is a price to pay. We are in debt to God.

I can easily see that across my lifetime so far, I owe a lot. The price I would need to pay God to set myself right with him – to bring my balance to zero – would be impossible to pay back, no matter how many good deeds I did.

There's a TV series on Netflix called *The Good Place*. It is about heaven and hell, although they have taken religion out of the equation. It's a light hearted show, but is very interesting to think about life after death without the faith element. There is no God, but instead a disengaged judge.

The basis is simply that you gain or lose points over your lifetime based on how many good and bad things you do. Your total number of points when you die determines where you go; if you have negative points you go to *The Bad Place* for eternal torturing. If you have a positive points total you go to *The Good Place* for an eternity of happiness.

The points are determined by a computer system, there is no relationship with the judge, she is really not interested. Once you die there is no chance of mercy or forgiveness.

I would love to talk about the series more, but I it would completely ruin it for anyone watching it, or who might in the future.

I know that might feel like a tangent, but here's the thing. Thanks be to God that we don't have a point scoring system. We have a King, a Master, who will soften his heart towards us, out of love and through relationship with him. He will cancel the debt when we ask for his forgiveness, and he will do it without end, we don't have a finite number of chances to mess up before it's too late and the mercy runs out. That is incredible, and wonderful and can fill us with hope and the ability to live a life in freedom through Jesus.

Let's pray. Father God we thank you for loving us so much that you sent your son as a sacrifice for us; to create a way for us to have unending forgiveness.

We confess our sins to you now, we fall on our knees like the servant in the parable, acknowledging that we can never repay you or match up to your standards, and humbly ask for your forgiveness once again.

We thank you Father that you have poured your mercy over us, setting us free from the burden of our sins. Amen

I'm going to quote the great TV detective Columbo now, who always said this as he was summing up and about to solve the crime – “just one more thing...”

It would be lovely to end the parable there, wouldn't it? But Jesus goes on further with the story. The servant, freshly forgiven, then goes after one of his peers who owes him a few pounds worth of talents. Like the first servant, he can't pay and begs for time to get the money together. But he is having none of it, and has the man thrown into prison.

This is quite shocking and the other servants, and the king, were outraged. So much so that the king becomes very angry and treats the servant with his own standards, and throws him in jail, the debt reinstated.

Jesus witnessed and knew the broken human condition. He had 'just one more thing' that he needed to say to Peter, and to all of us.

When Columbo solved his crime cases he metaphorically shone a light straight onto the culprit, and revealed the truth.

Jesus shines a light into our hidden, dark places too. He knows we can be slow learners and hard hearted at times despite his infinite goodness to us.

In the Lord's Prayer, he taught us to say 'forgive us our trespasses, our sins, as we forgive those who trespass against us.' The 'as we' means 'in the same way that' or 'to the same extent that' we forgive others.

I wonder how we even dare to pray that sometimes. Do we really want that? I'm not sure that I trust that my forgiveness levels are what I would want God to use towards me.

Jesus gives us a huge challenge. Here's how much we should forgive others-the same amount we want God to forgive us. Because that is what Jesus says will happen, in this parable and in his teaching just after the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:14-15.

He said "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

This makes for uncomfortable reading and should cause us to search our hearts.

There is of course good news – there always is with Jesus! But it's not a loophole or a get out of jail free card. We really do need to put in the work, from our hearts, to forgive. Sometimes that can be a painful and a process that takes time. But when we look at the consequences of not doing so, we know it is worth it.

As followers of Jesus, who accept him as our Saviour and have invited him to live within us – he does just that. He becomes part of us and guides us by his Holy Spirit. He teaches us his ways from within, including forgiveness, grace and mercy. He enables us to forgive as he does. He doesn't make us do it, it is our choice.

We can be in the dark, not seeing our sins, and we can bury painful situations that require our attention for forgiveness. And we can ask Jesus to shine a light on those things for us, trusting him to not condemn but to support us to deal with them in his presence, providing comfort and encouragement.

I don't want anyone feeling guilt, that is not from God. And there is no need to confess sins that have already been confessed and forgiven. If you are right with God, then that is great!

Time of reflection

You are now invited to spend a few minutes reflecting on the forgiveness given to you by God our Father through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have been unmerciful and need to forgive anyone, past or present. If there is, ask Jesus to help you with this, to comfort and strengthen you. Recognise this may be a process that takes time and you may need support from family or friends. Our church family are here to be with you through this.

You might like to read through the lyrics of the song called Mercy by Matt Redman

I will kneel in the dust
At the foot of the cross
Where mercy paid for me
Where the wrath I deserve
It is gone, it has passed
Your blood has hidden me

Mercy, mercy...

We will lift up the cup
And the bread we will break
Remembering Your love
We were fallen from grace
But You took all our shame
And nailed it to a cross

Mercy, mercy...

May I never lose the wonder
Oh, the wonder of Your mercy
May I sing Your hallelujah
Hallelujah, Amen

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Prayers of Intercession

Lord God we thank you for the grace and mercy you bestow upon us in your wonderful love.

We bring to you our prayers for the world, our country, our community, our church and our loved ones.

We continue to ask you Father to reign in our world, and we think of the coronavirus that continues to cause illness, death and fear. It has crippled businesses and put healthcare systems under immense pressure. Will you act to slow it down, to eradicate it and to bring healing to individuals and nations. Please give wisdom and strength to those in leadership roles who need to make very difficult decisions to protect those they serve.

We bring before you the devastating wildfires in America and ask that you will quench them and protect the firefighters and those living nearby. We pray for everyone who is managing poor mental health at the moment and ask you to be close to them, provide them with the support they need, including people to hold hope for them if they have lost the ability to see a future for themselves. Please protect those who feel they can't go on any longer and make yourself known to them, hold them in the palm of your hand and give them comfort and all they need to recover and live life to the full.

We pray for students getting ready to start university over the next few weeks, especially James and James and Eden. Go with them Lord, give them good friends and churches to be a part of. Help them to share your love with their peers. Enable them to learn well, to enjoy their courses and to discern the future you have for them. Keep them company when they feel lonely, homesick or overwhelmed. Remind them of their identity as your child and please keep them safe.

We pray for our church neighbours, Lord. For Place Farm School, the ambulance station, Weavers Lodge, the health centre and GP surgery and all the homes along the road. We bless them in Jesus name to be peaceful and safe places, to be healthy and to prosper. Help us to be good neighbours to them, show us how we can serve them and share who you are with them.

We bring before you Father those we know and love who need your healing today, in mind, body or spirit. We remember Roger, Nick and Claire in particular.

Please do pray for others you know too.

Finally, Father God we thank you for Peter, Jo, James and Sally. Be with them this weekend as they settle James into university. Grant Peter continued wisdom as he leads us and the rest he needs each week and refresh him with your Holy Spirit.

In Jesus name, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation
O my soul, praise Him for He is thy health and salvation
All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near
Praise Him in glad adoration

Praise to the Lord who o'er all things so wonderfully reigneth
Shelters thee under His wings, yea, so gladly sustaineth
Hast thou not seen how thy desires e'er have been
Granted in what He ordaineth

Praise to the Lord who doth prosper they work and defend thee
Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do
If with His love He befriend thee

Praise to the Lord, O let all that is in me adore Him
All that hath life and breath come now with praises before Him
Let the 'amen' sound from His people again
Gladly for aye we adore Him

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The Blessing

The words of the blessings are from Numbers 6 vs 24-26

The LORD bless you
 and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you
 and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face towards you
 and give you peace.

Amen