

READINGS and Reflection Trinity 14 (13th September 2020)

Collect :

Almighty God, you call your Church to witness that in Christ we are reconciled to you. Help us so to proclaim the good news of your love, that all who hear it may turn to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever.

or : Merciful God, your Son came to save us and bore our sins on the cross : may we trust in your mercy and know your love, rejoicing in the righteousness that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord

Old Testament Reading : Genesis 50:15-21 **Joseph Reassures His Brothers**

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "*What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?*" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "*Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.*" When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "*We are your slaves,*" they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "*Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.*" And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Psalm 103 vv1-13

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.

⁶ The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:

⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever;

¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

New Testament Reading : Romans 14. Vv1-12 The Weak and the Strong

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ 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. ⁴ 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.

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ 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. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister^[a]? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: "*As surely as I live says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'*"

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Canticle : The Song of Christ's glory

- 1 Christ Jesus was in the form of God, but he did not cling to equality with God.
- 2 He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and was born in our human likeness.
- 3 Being found in human form he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.
- 4 Therefore God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name above every name,
- 5 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth;
- 6 And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2.5-11

Gospel Reading : Matthew 18. 21-35 The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

²¹ 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?*"

²² Jesus answered, "*I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven times.*"

²³ Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. ²⁵ 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.

²⁶ At this the servant fell on his knees before him. *'Be patient with me,'* he begged, *'and I will pay back everything.'* ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, *'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'*

³⁰ But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² Then the master called the servant in. *'You wicked servant,'* he said, *'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.'* ³³ *Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'* ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

Reflection

What have we missed most these last 6 Covid months? For many, meeting together as a faith community (church) has been high on our list. I last preached and presided at St Columba's on 15th March. L3, when our Gospel readings changed for Easter from Matthew to John. They returned to Matthew on Trinity Sunday 7th June. So is our journey through Matthew's gospel something you have missed? Just in case, I thought this morning we might 'make amends' by looking at it!

Matthew wrote his gospel for a Jewish Christian fellowship (or church), (*ecclesia*) threatened by conservative Jews who believed it blasphemous to claim Jesus as their Messiah. Matthew wrote to convince them that Jesus was indeed Messiah, promised by Yahweh to fulfil their history. This was behind the whole design of his gospel.

I was dragged out by Alison on Wednesday to see how she was re-designing our garden now we have a back door and a conservatory. I'm not really one for design – I tend just to start things and they evolve, trial and error. But Matthew was a designer. The first 5 books of the OT were called the Pentateuch, their Torah or Law – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy - the foundation of the Jewish faith, telling of creation, how sin entered the world, God's choice of Israel as his special Covenant nation; their slavery in Egypt; rescued by Yahweh and led to Mt Sinai to be given their new law as God's freed people. Then through wilderness under Moses, until they reached their Promised Land. That was, and still is, the Jewish story – the Pentateuch.

Matthew designed his gospel around 5 discourses – 5 foundations for the Christian faith; between each discourse are events, narratives that connect them. Like the 4th gospel which has the 7 signs and the 7 'I am's' with reflections between them.

Discourse (i) the sermon on the Mount (chs 5-7) the Beatitudes - new law to fulfil the old Mt Sinai law.

(ii) Sending out the 12 (ch10): the settlement and conquest of the **new** Israel : *“As you go preach this message : the kingdom of heaven is near. If anyone does not welcome you shake the dust off your feet when you leave that town....”* Twelve... Numbers 13 : ‘The Lord said to Moses, *“Send one leader from each ancestral tribe to explore the land of Canaan”*. They went up and at the end of 40 days they returned. Caleb said : *“We should go up and take possession of the land”* But the 12 said : *“We can’t attack these people; they are stronger than us. We seemed like grasshoppers to them.”* ‘Enemy country’ – this was what the new 12 were to expect as they went out to ‘explore and proclaim the new Promised Land’, the Kingdom of heaven. *“Men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm will be saved. ...I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* Enemy country

(iii) The 3rd discourse (ch13) - the centre of Matthew’s Gospel - 6 parables about the secrets of the kingdom Jesus is bringing. For those who do not accept Jesus, parables hide the truth; for those who do, they reveal the true nature of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew’s first parables!

– the sower & the mustard seed, (in all synoptics) - the kingdom of heaven will become established and grow just as the kingdom of David. But for Matthew it will be in enemy country -Wheat & tares, hidden treasure, pearl of great price, the net (in Matthew only) – division and choice. New wisdom to fulfil the wisdom of Solomon . *‘When Jesus had finished these sayings he moved on to his home town, and taught in their synagogue. “Where did this man get this wisdom?” And they took offence at him.*

(iv) The 4th discourse (ch18) - this morning’s gospel. At Caesarea Philippi (ch16), Peter proclaimed, **“You are the Messiah!”**, then on the mountain , the Transfiguration - Moses, Elijah, Jesus : **“This is my Son! Listen to HIM – Jesus”**. Down the mountain, he warned them that the Son of Man would suffer, and be killed. The future without him around - they were to be the new Israel. Church. Ecclesia – used only in Matthew - twice : *‘You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church’*. *‘If he refuses to listen to the two witnesses, tell it to the church...’* How were Matthew’s Jewish Christians (and how are we) to live as members of this new ecclesia ?

(i) Humbly : his disciples asked Jesus : *“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”*. He set a child in their midst : *“Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”* . Status is totally meaningless

(ii) Care and forgiveness for everyone : the lost sheep – not just the goodies, but the deviants. Jesus’ answer to Peter : *forgive your brother 70x7 times. : limitless*. The unmerciful servant owed the king 10,000 talents – an impossible, limitless amount to repay; but the king for-gave him – cancelled the debt. The servant was owed a much smaller amount by his fellow-servant - 100 denarii, 1/ 600,000th of his own debt – easily repayable. But he was not willing to for-give (for-go). So he was handed over to be tortured until he paid back all he owed – totally impossible. Matthew’s Lord’s Prayer : *forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors*. The new church must emulate unconditional humility and forgiveness, since the church itself is a community of the forgiven.

Last Sunday, Matthew wrote about forgiving a brother (Christian by the way not blood sibling) : if meeting face and face and calling 2 witnesses fails (Leviticus 19 & Deuteronomy 19) then take it to the church –

not one designated person, but the whole ecclesia. “*When 2 or 3 come together in my name, there I am with them.* The church’s prayerful decision is Jesus’ decision! *Whatever you (plural) bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you (plural) loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* Authority in the new Israel is in the prayer of each ecclesia.

From now until Advent, when we change to Mark, we shall hear some of the events leading to the final discourse, known as the Olivet Discourse; then for the last 3 Sundays (November), 3 parables from the Discourse itself (ch 23-25): the wise and foolish virgins, the talents, the sheep and goats - forthcoming judgement and their need to be ready.

One more fascination about the 5 discourses – they are ‘chiasmic’ – the first and last are similar; the 2nd & 4th, with the central one being key.

The Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse are both on mountains, heaven. The first opens with 8 blessings ; Olivet with 7 woes. The 2nd and 4th Discourses are in the towns : 9.35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages... 7.24 : After Jesus and his disciples had arrived in Capernaum... Both are about discipleship – living in the world, the towns: the 12’s preaching practice in ch10; church discipleship ch18. And where did he reveal to believers the mystery of the kingdom – the centre of Matthew’s Gospel Ch13?

On the water. ‘*Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered that he got into a boat ...* The mystery was made clear, the whole Jewish story fulfilled by a death, the death of the Messiah

‘May we think on these things.....’ Tony