



EMMANUEL CHURCH – WORSHIP FOR 13TH SEPTEMBER 2020



Make some space at home to read and pray through the following, if possible, on the morning of Sunday 13th September 2020.
If you are able, watch this small service via the Emmanuel Church website: www.emmanueleastbourne.org.uk.

Welcome and Gathering Words

Opening Prayer: Let us confess our sins to God and resolve to accept and share his forgiveness.

Keep silence and reflect upon all that we regret; all that we bear responsibility for as individuals, as a church, as a country, as people: our care of self, of others, of planet, of all that is God's.

Lord God most merciful, we confess that we have sinned, through our own fault, and in common with others, in thought, word and deed, and through what we have left undone. We ask to be forgiven. By the power of your Spirit turn us from evil to good, help us to forgive others, and keep us in your ways of righteousness and love; through Christ our Lord. Amen. Hear these words of grace for you and me: our sins are forgiven for his sake. Thanks be to God.

Reading: Genesis 50: 15-21 'Joseph Forgives His Brothers'

¹⁵ Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?' ¹⁶ So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷ "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.' ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹ So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Reading: Matthew 18:21-22 'Forgiveness in the Kingdom'

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' ²² Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

Address: 'The Release of Forgiveness'

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer:

Loving God, we offer these prayers to you in light of your marvellous love shown to us

We pray for our brothers and sisters who hurt in body, mind and spirit. For...

We pray for our neighbours who are experiencing separation or grief. For...

We pray for our friends who are struggling to find hope, faith or comfort. For...

We pray for all who care: in hospitals, hospices, care homes and homes. For...

We pray for those whose names we will never know, whose needs we will never fully understand, but whose cause gives us deep concern for the people of this world.

Loving God, we offer these prayers to you in light the gifts we might give to others; in light of who we can be when we live as people full of grace; in the light of the love of Christ. **AMEN.**

Blessing

Address: 'The Release of Forgiveness'



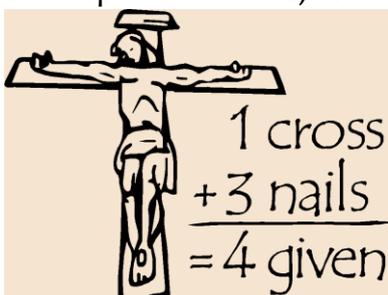
There's something about the end of Genesis that makes me think of 'The Godfather'! Jacob: Don Vito Corleone, the Godfather himself; Joseph and his brothers are the sons and family. And just as Marlon Brando dies off in the film, in Genesis 50 Jacob dies and there's a vacuum at the head of the family... who's going to fill it? Now, fortunately, you won't read anything about Jacob and horses' heads in the Old Testament, but this is a major family drama which unfolds all the way through to this last chapter of Genesis. Jacob is gone: so what's Joseph going to do? Joseph is now Michael Corleone (played by Al Pacino) the new Don, the new Godfather. After all these years has Joseph forgiven the eleven brothers who sold him off to slavery? Has he forgotten the wrong he suffered? Or has he been biding his time, waiting to become the new Don: is swift and violent retribution about to be unleashed?

As the reading makes clear, Jacob may be dead, Joseph may now be the boss, but the family drama continues. Joseph's brothers remain damaged by their guilt over what they did to him, they are ashamed and scared. Joseph forgave them back in Chapter 45... but they beg again.

Guilt and shame are appalling feelings to live with. You will know people, as I do, whose lives are affected now by things they did or said years ago, that they cannot undo or unsay. And it weighs on the shoulders so heavily, causes depression, self-loathing, affects old relationships, prevents new ones. Pastorally as a church community, we have to look out for one another, and care for one another particularly those who may be carrying wounds and scars from long ago. Guilt imprisons, restricts and destroys life. God's church can share God's graceful love and forgiveness.

Sadly, it's sometimes the case that it is the church *itself* which has to seek forgiveness. I was listening on the radio this week to an interview with a man called Matthew Hyndman – whose homosexuality was labelled a sin and who was prayed over by his church to exorcise this sin from him. He was offered gay-conversion therapy and made to feel unloved, "damaged and fixable", so much so that he even contemplated suicide. Although in Matthew Hyndman's case he was made to feel evil and guilty, actually it is the church which should be seeking forgiveness where it is the church which has caused pain by discrimination. Emmanuel as a Methodist/URC partnership is a church which welcomes people within same-sex relationships; you can be gay and come to church, lead in the church, be a minister in the church. In the 21st Century we have an opportunity not just as Emmanuel, but as Methodists, as United Reformed, to declare the love of God to all, to preach a gospel of forgiveness and grace, to release people from guilt and shame by God's power, not perpetuate it. It's more than an opportunity: it's a responsibility.

Fortunately for Joseph's brothers, Joseph continues to remain faithful to God his heavenly Father. Jacob may be dead, but the forgiveness Joseph granted once before can be reaffirmed. He again sees that, although the brothers did act badly, that God is *always* at work to bring peace, reconciliation, *always* to bring about good. In the midst of complex family relationships, threats and murder and *Godfather*-like shenanigans, God is still there, and always at work for good. After 50 chapters of Genesis, there is therefore a new beginning: comfort and lasting peace have replaced shame, fear of retribution and guilt. Forgiveness brings relief from pain, and new life.



The same possibilities are there for us and for all people: and as Christians to share in the goodness of God which is all around us. God makes us an offer: to forgive our sins, and calls upon us to forgive the sins of others. When Jesus tells Peter this it's not as a helpful suggestion, but a commandment. God's offer of forgiveness is made in love, completed in Christ. You could say God makes us an offer that we dare not refuse!