

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

Prayers, Readings, Reflection and Song.

“Welcome to another short act of worship for the Parish Church of St Martin. For those who are able to follow it as written, I hope it offers some comfort, encouragement and a sense of being together despite the distance between us.”

Rev Jonny



*Be still, and draw yourself closer to the God who rests beside you,
before you and within you.*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy
Spirit.

All **Amen.**

The Lord be with you

All **And also with you**

As God's beloved children, we are invited to come to our
God with the fullness of our lives, to admit our love and
our hate, to admit our faith and our fear. Trusting in God's
mercy, let us make our confession, first in silent prayer.

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the sinner:

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

You bring light to those in darkness:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.

Amen.

The Collect for the day

Almighty God,
who called your Church to bear witness
that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself:
help us to proclaim the good news of your love,
that all who hear it may be drawn to you;
through him who was lifted up on the cross,
and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading, Romans 13: 8-end

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

This is the word of the Lord
All **Thanks be to God**

Gospel Reading, from Matthew 18: 15-20

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All Praise to you, O Christ

Reflection

Some years ago I worked in a large publishers office, and close to my desk was the door to the IT department, and on the door was a sign that said, 'PLEASE DO NOT ASK US TO FIX YOUR COMPUTER UNTIL YOU HAVE TRIED TURNING IT OFF, AND TURNING IT ON AGAIN.' 9 times out of ten, that is probably going to fix it.

Well this passage from Matthew is a bit like that. You have a problem? Someone in your fellowship has upset you, or has strayed from the path? Well, here are the steps you need to take to fix it.

And the gospel writer really spells it out. So let's just follow the logic.

Someone has upset you, or offended you, or troubles you. I'm sure we can all relate to that. To err is human, let's not forget. And what's the first thing we should do? Talk to that person. It sounds simple doesn't it, but how many times have we *not* done that, but instead talked *about* that person to *other* people instead?

Well, that's called gossip, and as harmless as it might sound, the early church knew just how damaging that can be. When we refuse to engage, when we reject the relationship, when instead we spread dissent, that is when the seed of discord takes root.

No, we must speak to the person concerned: engage in relationship, abide in relationship and trust in relationship. That must always be the first port of call. And if this works, 'you have regained your brother or sister'.

But it doesn't always work. Some people will reject that relationship right back at you and refuse to listen to your concerns. It happens, but there is another further step.

Now, says Jesus, you should gather 2 or 3 others from your fellowship, and speak with the offender together. And there's a fine line here. This isn't about ganging up, but about showing love. Especially when someone is blind to the pain they are inflicting on themselves and others, they may need an intervention like this.

You may have heard about this when someone has a drug problem, or drink problem, or even if their mental health has become unmanageable, a group of friends and experts can gather together and stage an intervention. But the emphasis is always on love and support. 'Joe', they will say, 'we love you, and we want you to get the help you need'.

I know folk whose very lives have been saved by the power of this kind of love – where family and friends have together in love to speak truth to the dangers of addiction and self-harm. It truly can be a truly remarkable act.

But Jesus goes on to say that if they still will not redeem their ways, then present them to the whole community – what would later be called the church.

And here's the amazing thing. Jesus defines the church in a most simple and extraordinary way – so simple we might just miss it – he says, 'where 2 or three of you are gathered in my name (in a loving, trusting and peaceful way) there I am in the midst of you'.

Just think about that. We are so used to thinking that Jesus is present in the bread and wine of Communion, or in the words and wisdom of the Scriptures, or in the beauty and bounty of creation, but here Jesus

undercuts all of that and says, it is in relationship that I abide.

And we have come full circle. Back to the fundamental importance of relationships. When there's a dispute in the fellowship, the highest court of arbitration is not some divine authority, and certainly isn't the priest, but it is the relationship between believers.

This is the crucible in which the church is formed and held – this is where the Kingdom of God takes root.

And notice also what Jesus says of those relationships, and he uses words that he only recently used for Peter alone, when he said, 'you are the Rock on which the church is built', he also said to Peter words that he now delivers to all the faithful, 'whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

In other words: forgive. Forgiveness is the life-blood of right relationships. And right relationships are the foundation of the church. When all is said and done, forgive.

We have the power to bind each other up by our unforgiveness, and we have the power to set people free by our forgiveness. It is granted to us as a universal gift by which we can transform the world.

Have you ever seen footage or read account of the victims of unspeakable crimes – who have lost loved ones to terror and violence – and yet who are able to forgive? I don't know how they do it, but they do. Or do you remember the words of Nelson Mandela, when he finally left Robben Island? "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

We can bind up our lives, and the lives of our loved ones, our family and community, by our gossip and our criticism, our bitterness and unforgiveness – we all know that's true. Or we can set them free, by forgiveness.

But let me end by saying this – there is nothing new in all creation without this mystery of forgiveness. Without it, we remain locked in the past, unable to let go of regret and recrimination. Sometimes I look at the world and I feel that we might just be locked in a perpetual cycle of unforgiveness.

But I look at God and I see something else. Forgiveness is the very nature of God. It might just even be the very name of God. The nature of God is to set us free, to break our chains and to let us live in love and peace once again.

And when we live this way, together; then we allow God's grace to flow, and there is Christ in the midst of us.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Pray for one another – those in our church community

Pray for the Parish, the Island and the World

Pray for the sick, the isolated, the anxious and depressed

Pray for the dying, and those who mourn

Pray for yourselves, and for your own needs

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

The Intercessions may end as follows

Merciful Father

All Accept these prayers

for the sake of your son,

our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

The Peace

Christ came and proclaimed the gospel,

peace to those who are far off

and peace to those who are near.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

All and also with you.

Let us pray with confidence, as our Saviour taught us

All **Our Father**

**who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from
evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen.**

The Blessing.

Christ the good shepherd,
who laid down his life for the sheep,
draw you and all who hear his voice,
to be one flock within one fold;
and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and
the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All **In the name of Christ. Amen.**