

St James' Church, Weybridge

Trinity 14 (Proper 19 Year A) – 13th September 2026

Introduction and Call to Worship

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great goodness. We come before God with thankful hearts to seek grace for ourselves and others.

Today's Readings

First Reading Romans 14:1-12

Paul's advice on how Christians can show consideration for one another, rather than being quick to pass judgement.

Gospel Matthew 18:21-35

In response to Peter's question about the possible limits to forgiveness, Jesus tells a story that shows how gratitude for limitless forgiveness must be expressed in forgiveness towards others.

HOMILY

"How often should I forgive?"

(Matthew 18:21)

We seem to be living in times of multiple suffering around the world, from war to natural disasters. Just two days ago we were reminded once again of September 11th, 2001, now 25 years ago, when terror struck the United States, killing 2,997 people, injuring over 6,000 others, and causing over \$10 billion in infrastructure and property damage.

Many are still suffering today as the death toll continues to rise, not least following the collapse of the Twin Towers, because of the deadly air they breathed in Manhattan, New York that morning. Most of us over 26 years old can probably recall where we were when we heard or even saw on television those horrific scenes unfold and we will never forget.

In the face of such suffering, and loss, we could be tempted to retaliate, but that doesn't seem to be how those who lost a partner, parent or child responded. I have been so moved to hear and read about those whose lives continued, changed but often re-purposed following those events. Part of coming to terms with loss is recognising that forgiveness is power, and for those who follow Jesus, it is an intrinsic element of being Christian. Do you struggle with forgiveness, even in small ways? In our Gospel reading, according to Mathew, Jesus tells us that God's Kingdom operates by totally different standards from the world, which I find to be quite a relief.

In the new community that Jesus came to bring, wrongdoing matters – and God is judge, and we shouldn't forget that. Nonetheless, unlimited forgiveness is expected from those whom God has already forgiven. But how can we forgive such terrible acts of violence, evil, war and terrorism, such as 911?

We are reminded today that Christians are called by God to forgive from the bottom of our heart, just as God forgives us, because ultimately God is the judge who stands over all, and through Jesus Christ has put an end to the consequence of sin and offered eternal life in return – a place in his Kingdom of love, joy and peace.

Jesus opened wide his arms upon the cross, in the greatest act of reconciliation and embrace ever known to humanity, because God forgives us first. And this means putting aside our grudges, failed hopes, fears and that desire for recompense and revenge, and focussing on prayers of peace and actions that lead to reconciliation. We are called to be people who look forward in hope as we strive to build God's Kingdom here and wherever we live our lives.

To achieve this lofty aim, we must live to the Lord, not for ourselves, as St Paul reminds us in our first reading from his letter to the Romans *"Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God."* (Romans 14: 10-12).

Jesus said, *'My heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'* Again, this feels difficult as God's Kingdom values challenge our world approach and turn everything upside down. Forgiveness is the right Christian response, along with a desire to prevent sin and human failure from happening again.

It is very hard, but it is our vocation as Christians to be people of forgiveness and reconciliation. In the words of one of our Eucharistic prayers, we ask God not to weigh our merits but to pardon our offences. Let us do the same for those around us in our daily lives and beyond.

An ordered human society needs a system of justice to make it work. Rule breaking must be dealt with, and dangerous people must be removed from society. We human beings instinctively feel that wrongdoing should be punished. There is a complex philosophical and practical debate about the function of prison and other legal responses to crime, a hot potato in the political arena right now. But justice is not the same thing as revenge.

So, the Church, the body of Christ living and departed, is rightly different and the reason is simple. We have all been forgiven everything first, because Jesus opened wide his arms for us upon the cross and died to take away our sins. We will celebrate Holy Cross Day tomorrow, as we recall what our Lord did for each one of us. In other words, our debt was as massive as that which the slave owed the king, but God does not ask for it to be paid. Forgiveness is much easier to talk about than to put into action and we are tempted to look back and judge, we are human after all. But there is no place for the condemnation of anyone, if our heart is set towards God's kingdom. God is love, and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them.

Effort on our part is required, to strive for God's Kingdom of reconciliation, love joy and peace. We need to look forward with hope and proclaim (and mean) forgiveness from the heart, which is an act of faith. This is God's Christian call upon each of us. It is a hard teaching, but essential for God's kingdom, which is what we seek to build, on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.

Father Damain Harrison-Miles, September 2026.