

**Sunday 17 September 2023**

# The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity



**Sermon** © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

**Prayers of intercession** © Jonathan Maury SSJE.

**Liturgy** © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

**Bible readings** © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

All the hymns are hosted on YouTube. Please click on the links to hear them.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

## Introduction and welcome

**HYMN 1** [The day of resurrection](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

## The Welcome

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.**

## The Preparation

**All Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul, with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

**All Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, to be our advocate in heaven, and to bring us to eternal life.

Therefore, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith,  
firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments  
and to live in love and peace with all.

**All** Almighty God, our heavenly Father,  
we have sinned against you  
and against our neighbour  
in thought and word and deed,  
through negligence, through weakness,  
through our own deliberate fault.  
We are truly sorry  
and repent of all our sins.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for us,  
forgive us all that is past  
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life  
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,  
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in life eternal;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All** Amen.

## **The Gloria**

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

**All** Glory be to God in Heaven,  
Songs of joy and peace we bring,  
Thankful hearts and voices raising,  
To creation's Lord we sing.  
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,  
Glory be to God our King:  
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,  
Bore the load of this world's sin;  
Only Son of God the Father,  
You have brought us peace within.  
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,  
Now your glorious reign begin:  
Now your glorious reign begin.

**You O Son of God are Holy,  
You we praise with one accord.  
None in heav'n or earth is like you,  
Only you are Christ the Lord.  
With the Father and the Spirit,  
Ever worshipped and adored:  
Ever worshipped and adored.**

### **The Collect for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity**

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit  
upon your Church in the burning fire of your love:  
grant that your people may be fervent  
in the fellowship of the gospel  
that, always abiding in you,  
they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**All Amen.**

### **First reading**

A reading from the First Book of Moses called Genesis

Realising 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?' So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, "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. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? 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. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. *Genesis 50:15-21*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

## Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Romans

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. 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 14:1-12*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

**HYMN 2 The Lord's Prayer**

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

## Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

**All Glory to you O Lord.**

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

'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have

patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, “Pay what you owe.” Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?” And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’ *Matthew 18:21-35*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

**All Praise to you O Christ.**

## Sermon

It’s amazing how rarely Jesus seems to have spoken about the Church.

The word ‘church’ occurs three times in the Gospels. Jesus first mentions the word quite late in Matthew’s Gospels, in Matthew 16:13–20, when referring to people who recognised Him as Messiah and Lord, and suggests using St Peter as a kind of template. It means that for Jesus the word ‘church’ never means a building or an institution but always a group of people and never an individual. That was the reading for last week. We next look toward today’s readings.

There are surely many definitions of a church. The verse occurring before today’s lectionary reading, Matthew 18:20, is one of the best, when Jesus says, ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst’. It means the Church that Jesus desires of us is a collection of disciples meeting for him and with him.

Unfortunately, that group can pretend to assemble in Jesus’ name, and can fool itself that Jesus is also joining them. They are obvious problems. That’s why, in today’s passage, Jesus gives us a litmus test of whether such a group is indeed the kind of church that Jesus desires. The clue is their attitude to ‘forgiveness’—what it means and how often it occurs so, in effect, whether it’s withdrawn or not.

Forgiveness is a slippery word because it can mean different things to different people. It certainly does not mean being treated a ‘doormat’ or obeying an abuser who says, ‘Get over it’. True forgiveness—the kind Jesus wants—can neither be imposed nor demanded. Nor does forgiveness mean making light of the harm done.

Forgiveness is never easy. Indeed, as a good generalisation, true forgiveness becomes harder in proportion to the scale of the harm it seeks to address. It's harder still if that harm is repeated. And can feel absolutely impossible if the perpetrator does not acknowledge that harm has been done. Yet Jesus says that forgiveness is the proof positive that we are a genuine church. What is Jesus saying?

Firstly, Jesus is talking about forgiveness *within the context of a church*, between its members. He is not talking about people outside the church. We're talking about interactions between people who profess the same faith in Jesus, which itself implies that we can appeal to a shared series of beliefs. The penalty for non-compliance is expulsion from the church. The perpetrator will therefore want forgiveness because of the consequences; not fearing the consequences says the perpetrator is not serious about his or her Christian faith. Perhaps it was accidental; maybe it was not intended. It was not deliberate with malice aforethought.

Second, Jesus is talking about a church and, we've seen, a true church comprises people who recognise Jesus as messiah and Son of God. *Forgiveness becomes possible in consequence of our shared spiritual foundations.* We convene as a church in Jesus' name. We worship as a church in the power of his Spirit. Into that context, true forgiveness occurs under the scrutiny of his presence. Forgiveness is therefore a spiritual activity rather than either an intellectual decision ('I have decided to forgive you') or a statement ('forgive you') because it involves the soul. Spiritual relationships always involve God, so a spiritual act of forgiveness occurs with God the Almighty as both its sponsor and as a fellow participant.

Third, we forgive *because we are forgiven*. In his trademark prayer, Jesus tells us to petition God by saying something like 'Forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us.' That 'sin against' does not so much mean a spiritual harm but that God thinks that harming a fellow church member is wrong. It's into that part of the conversation that we ask which of the characters we choose to identify with in today's central parable: are we sinned against or sinning? Jesus is saying that we are the unjust steward because God has forgiven us more than we can conceive or imagine. We have been forgiven by God and pass on the spiritual blessing by forgiving others in the church. That's why Ephesians 4:32 says, 'Forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ' and Colossians 3:33 is more emphatic still: 'Remember how the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others'.

Inevitably, we will be hurt by members of the church; and we will cause hurt. Hopefully those hurts will be small, but for many of us they will be big or at least feel big. Jesus tells us to forgive them all. Thankfully God Himself will help us. We must remember that fact we forgive is one of the principal ways in which we demonstrate that we wish to be regarded as true members of the Church Jesus wants.

## The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,  
the source of all being and life,  
the one for whom we exist?

**All We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,  
who took our human nature,  
died for us and rose again?

**All We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,  
who gives life to the people of God  
and makes Christ known in the world?

**All We believe and trust in him.**

This is the faith of the Church.

**All This is our faith.**

**We believe and trust in one God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

## Prayers of intercession

Lifted up from the earth in his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead Christ draws all people to himself. That we may be servants and ministers of the reconciliation which the Lamb of God has accomplished, let us pray saying, O God of forgiveness, grant mercy.

The Beloved Disciple understood that the pouring out of water and blood from Jesus' side signified the giving of the Spirit. That by that same Spirit we may be forgiven and forgive others. We pray,

**All O God of forgiveness, grant mercy.**

Sinfulness originates in a deep wound to our humanity which hinders us from accepting love. That Christ's healing touch in prayer may disable our self-reliant pride and make us depend on grace alone. We pray,

**All O God of forgiveness, grant mercy.**



In our fallenness we continually turn in upon ourselves to seek fulfilment without self-offering. That the Eternally-Begotten One may heal us and raise us up to worship you in spirit and truth. We pray,

**All O God of forgiveness, grant mercy.**

Through our biases and shortcomings, the life of your Church has been marred by many sinful failures. That in humility we may willingly learn all that you seek to teach us through them. We pray,

**All O God of forgiveness, grant mercy.**

We cannot keep pace with the risen Christ who goes before us if we are encumbered by guilt. That by regular confession we may shed the burdens of remembered sin and move forward encouraged by the Spirit. We pray,

**All O God of forgiveness, grant mercy.**

You teach us to confess our sins to one another and call us to further the Church's ministry of reconciliation. That we may reach out to the sick, the alienated and perplexed, those in prison, and the marginalised with your gracious healing and forgiveness. We pray,

**All O God of forgiveness, grant mercy.**

With hearts humbled by your gracious forgiveness, O God, we now name before you the persons and concerns which you have placed in them ...

Grant, O Lord, that as your Son Jesus Christ prayed for his enemies on the cross, so we may have grace to forgive those who wrongfully or scornfully use us, that we ourselves may be able to receive your forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

**All Amen.**

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**

## **The peace**

Peace to you from God our heavenly Father.

Peace from his Son Jesus Christ who is our peace.

Peace from the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

**All And also with you.**

**HYMN 3** [St Patrick's breastplate](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

## The Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,  
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;  
and the blessing of God the Almighty,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
be with you now and remain with you always.

**All**    **Amen.**

**HYMN 4** [Shout alleluia to the risen King](#) (click on this link to hear the hymn)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

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

## The Liturgy of the Sacrament

### Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

**All and also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**All We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All It is right to give thanks and praise.**

Father, you made the world and love your creation.  
You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.  
His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.  
And so we gladly thank you,  
with saints and angels praising you, and saying,

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;  
and as we obey his command,  
send your Holy Spirit,  
that broken bread and wine outpoured  
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends  
and, taking bread, he praised you.  
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:  
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;  
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.  
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:  
Drink this, all of you;  
this is my blood of the new covenant,  
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,  
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,  
we proclaim his death and resurrection  
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

**All Christ has died.**  
**Christ is risen.**  
**Christ will come again.**

Lord of all life,  
help us to work together for that day  
when your kingdom comes  
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,  
gather us in your loving arms  
and bring us with all the saints  
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,  
for ever and ever.

**All Amen.**

## **The Lord's Prayer**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

## **Breaking of the Bread**

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,  
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ

which he gave for you,

and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,

and feed on him in your hearts

by faith with thanksgiving.

**All** We do not presume  
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,  
trusting in our own righteousness,  
but in your manifold and great mercies.  
We are not worthy  
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.  
But you are the same Lord  
whose nature is always to have mercy.  
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,  
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ  
and to drink his blood,  
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body  
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,  
and that we may evermore dwell in him,  
and he in us.  
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

### **Prayer after Communion**

Keep, O Lord, your Church, with your perpetual mercy;  
and, because without you our human frailty cannot but fall,  
keep us ever by your help from all things hurtful,  
and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All** Amen

**All** Almighty God,  
we thank you for feeding us  
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.  
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies  
to be a living sacrifice.  
Send us out in the power of your Spirit  
to live and work  
to your praise and glory.  
Amen.