

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : September 13th, 2020
“Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity”

TRINITY 14 2020

When I was a very new and young curate, my training Vicar said to me one day – “One of the crucial things we all need to learn in ministry is when to apologise, to say sorry”. I have never forgotten his words and they have stood me in good stead over the years. The ability to be quick to say sorry, to apologise to someone for something will often result in the tension disappearing from a tricky situation. In courts, if the accused shows signs of genuine remorse, that can go a long way. If only Dominic Cummings or Prince Andrew had said ... but perhaps we shouldn't go there. Note though that it is a two-way thing. We can be ready to say sorry to someone – but the other person we have hurt or upset also needs to assure us of their generosity in forgiveness.

Almost two thirds of Jesus' teaching is directly or indirectly about forgiveness, so it is at the heart of the Christian Gospel. Christian churches are crammed with those who know they have been forgiven; who have, by the grace of God, been given the chance to start their lives over again. It is why our services all begin with the confession and are followed by the absolution – the reassurance that God forgives us.

So, forgiveness is a thread running through this Sunday's readings. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he implores his hearers not to judge others, and in the Gospel, we hear a call to forgive not 7 times but 77 times! There is a recognition here that forgiveness is not easy, but that it is nevertheless necessary – because our God is a God of mercy. If forgiveness seems impossible in some situations, then we are commanded to leave judgement to God, who knows his world and his people more deeply than do we.

For many people in our world of today, with the limitations imposed upon us because of the current crisis, there is a sense of re-evaluating our lives and the way that we live them. Gone is much that we used to take for granted and in many ways, we are having to learn to live in a simpler way...maybe not back to how things were in 1900, as someone suggested last week but certainly a recognition that we cannot go on as we used to. That realisation covers many areas of our lives – not least the need to value more deeply God’s creation and the environment that we live in and which we will pass on to those who come after us – appropriate in this period of Creationtide.

For some it is the phrase “*carpe diem*” which is now at the forefront of their lifestyle. ‘Seize the day’ – to make the most of the days that are given to us, to seize the day, to live this present life to the full, rather than planning too far into an unknown future. For some it is also the realisation that life is too short and precious to go on carrying burning resentments of past wrongs and hurts – but being humble and mature enough to show a genuine sense of forgiveness to those around us, if that is possible. Above all, it is God who gives us the chance to seize the day and, coining a familiar if hackneyed phrase, to realise that ‘today is the first day of the rest of our lives’. Amen.