

This week's Scripture - Sunday 13th September - Proper 19

Genesis 50.15-21; Psalm 103.1-13; Romans 14.1-12; Matthew 18.21-35

Genesis 50.15-21 The reading from the Hebrew Scriptures shares Joseph's words to his brothers. Following Jacob's death, Joseph's brothers were worried that Joseph still had a grudge for what they had done. Instead, Joseph sees that God used what happened to him for good, though his brothers intended harm. Joseph was able to save them all by being sent to Egypt ahead of them. Joseph assures his brothers that he will not only provide for them, but for their children, as indeed Joseph's legacy did until the time of Moses.

Psalm 103.1-13 begins with a blessing for God, and a reminder that God is the one who forgives, redeems, satisfies all needs, and restores the people. God is on the side of the oppressed, working for justice. God was made known to Moses and to the people of Israel. God deals with the people through steadfast love, not by holding sins against the people, for God is slow to anger. God is the one who forgives, removes transgressions, and has compassion for the people as a parent has compassion for their child.

Romans 14.1-12 The Epistle readings conclude the selections from Romans. Paul gives instructions to the church in Rome, primarily Jewish, on how to welcome Gentiles. Some of the new converts would not eat meat that came from sacrifices in the Greek temples, and some of the Jewish believers no longer kept kosher. Paul warns the Romans not to judge but to accept these differences, the same with those who keep the Sabbath on the last day of the week and those who did not. All those practices were done to honour God, and therefore should not be used to judge others, upholding any one way as better than another. Instead, Paul reminds the Roman church that they live and die for Christ, not for themselves. All bow before God, not before each other; therefore, all are accountable to God for judgment, not as to what practices and customs they uphold.

Matthew 18.21-35 Peter asks Jesus about forgiveness. Peter wants to know how often he needs to forgive, thinking it's quantifiable, but Jesus' response shows that forgiveness is not only a process, but a way of life. Jesus then tells a parable about a servant who begged for forgiveness from the king, for the servant had a debt he could not repay. The king, out of pity, showed mercy, and granted him forgiveness. But after the servant was released, that servant went to a second servant who owed the first money. The first had the second thrown into prison because the second could not repay his debt. The other servants were upset at the injustice and complained to the king. The king had the first servant brought before him and judged him harshly, for the king had granted him mercy, but the first servant would not grant the same mercy to the second servant. The first servant was not transformed by the act of forgiveness granted him. So the king had the first servant tortured until he could pay his debt. Jesus told this story as a warning that forgiveness is not earned, but granted, and that the disciples must forgive others in the same way they were forgiven. Perhaps the torture is what happens to our hearts when we hold grudges and do not understand what a powerful gift forgiveness is.

Praying Together...

Call to Worship

We gather our voices and spirits in praise.

O God, quiet our souls so we may listen.

We seek within our heart Your call on our lives.

O God, quiet our minds so we may ponder Your words.

We long to join together in person;

However, we know You are with all of us now.

O God, unite us together as one in worship of You.

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Forgiving God,

we confess that we struggle to forgive one another.

We resist forgiveness, for holding a grudge seems easier.

Vengeance is more tempting.

However, you have forgiven us,

and called us into the hard work of forgiving those who sin against us,

in the ways we still sin against one another.

Help us to hold ourselves accountable, to do right where we can,

and to make the initial steps in seeking forgiveness and forgiving others.

Help us to know we are not alone,

and grant us the wisdom to know the resources that can help us in this journey.

In the name of Christ, who forgives us all, we pray. Amen.

Prayer

Sojourning God, lead us into Your ways.

Lead us into the paths of righteousness.

Lead us to the places of still waters and green pastures, places of restoration.

Lead us with Your staff that guides us through the valley of the shadow,

and lead us to the table You have prepared for us.

May we know that we are never alone,

that You travel with us through all the difficulties of life, leading us on.

In Your name we pray, Sojourning God. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The peace of Christ is with you. God knows you and loves you for who you truly are.

God knows your heart, and that you long to do right. Trust in God's ways and show mercy.

Pursue peace, love, and forgiveness. You are not alone. You are loved and carried by God.

Go and share the good news, loving and forgiving one another. Amen.