

## Online Worship: Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September



### Creation Time: *Choosing Forgiveness*

#### Introductory music: At the name of Jesus

#### Welcome

Welcome to the service this morning. I am Karen Smith, and I shall be leading the service today. Ruth introduced us last week to this period of time known as Creation time. This week we are worshipping from the outdoors in my garden, sharing those places where I often sit and feel close to God. I am starting in the arbour, festooned with hop vines. Let us prepare for worship in the outdoors.

#### Opening words & prayer

God is here, as we, God's people, gather to praise, to pray and to reflect. Move amongst us, by your Spirit, that we might see your Kingdom come, your will be done.

Let us listen to the quiet understanding that comes from gathering in the Spirit, whether we gather physically or gather as part of God's whole church, meeting on this day, around the world.

Let us give our thanks and praise to you, gracious God.

Let us pray, in the quiet...

*[Hold a moment of stillness]*

Come amongst us, holy God, clear our hearts and minds from distractions and turn our thoughts to you this day. Amen

Written by Tim Baker; adapted by Karen Smith

#### Call to worship

Come to the God who knows us,  
to the God who created our being,  
to the God who knows our frailty,  
to the God who loves and cherishes us beyond measure.  
Come as you are and worship God.

#### Hymn: Let all creation

Let all creation praise our Lord above  
Let every hill and vale unite in love  
Help us as stewards to heal and repair  
To spread your healing power everywhere

Let earth and sky unite in hymns of praise  
May we learn more of more respectful ways  
For our part in how nature feels distress  
We bring our sorrow and our hearts confess

We have a duty to respond with care  
To all creation, we must learn to share  
How you implore us to live faith-fueled lives  
And for your kingdom come to pray and strive

As people called to walk the narrow way  
We lift the world you made as now we pray  
Forgive the way we have misused your wealth  
Restore your balance to it and ourselves

As we come to our prayers of adoration & confession, you join me as I sit by the crab apple tree, planted last year. It's laden with fruit which I am sure the birds will enjoy this winter, & the bees and butterflies are loving the verbenas & cosmos behind it. We are joined by Whistler, the OES, who is part of life in the garden.

### Prayers of Adoration, confession and Lord's Prayer

God of love and grace beyond our telling,  
we bring our thankful hearts to you,  
acknowledging that without you we are nothing  
and with you we can be so much more...  
thankful that you care for us, and love us beyond measure;  
that you have endless patience with us;  
that you teach us time and time again  
what it is to be committed to you and your way...  
thankful that you reveal yourself to us in myriad ways,  
to inspire us and evoke within us a heartfelt response...  
thankful that while all this is for everyone who will come to you and  
accept you, we each recall -  
it is for me – for me! – and may I know it deep within.  
With overflowing hearts, hear our prayer.  
**Amen.**

Forgiving God,  
more willing to forgive than often we are to confess,  
help us to see our failings,  
to see where we fall short,  
to see where we deceive ourselves,  
where we close our eyes and ears  
to the ripples of our wrongdoing.  
May we breathe in the reality of our actions,  
the need to change, the depth of our unworthiness.  
We come before you, seeking forgiveness. (keep silence)

Now let us breathe in the power of your forgiveness,  
and breathe out the need to live and love  
in the shadow of your forgiveness of us,  
that we may forgive as you have forgiven us.

**Amen.**

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### Assurance of Pardon

Behold: there is a new heaven, a new earth  
and a new city, where the river of life flows,  
where the tree of life bears fruit in every season.  
This heaven, this city, this river, this tree are a vision  
of your life reborn, restored, and renewed.  
Thanks be to God!  
God in Community, Holy in One, hear us as we pray as you have  
taught us, saying,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done,  
in earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those that 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**

### Readings:

Genesis 50: 15 – 21 read by Philip Le Fanu

**15** When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"

**16** So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: **17** 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

**18** His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. **19** But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Romans 14: 1 -12 read by Tom Dean

**1** Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. **2** One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. **3** The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

**4** Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. **5** One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. **6** Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

**7** For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. **8** If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

**9** For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. **10** You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. **11** It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God." **12** So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

You find me now in the vegetable garden; it's full all year - you will see the Brussel sprouts growing for Christmas, the kale for the winter & the runner beans having a last flush of flowers in the warm days of early autumn.

### Reflection: *Choosing Forgiveness*

Our Old Testament reading today brings the story of Joseph and the difficult relationship with his brothers to a conclusion. If you recall he was the favourite son of his father, Jacob, and his ten brothers were so bitter and jealous that they sold him into slavery. Later he was falsely accused of attempted rape, unjustly imprisoned, and forgotten by a royal official who promised to help him. Joseph had every reason to sever ties with his family, vent hatred on humanity, and slam the door on God: but he didn't.

Later when Joseph rose to high position in Egypt, severe famine plagued the land. But through God's involvement with Joseph, Egypt was well prepared. When Joseph's brothers heard of Egypt's abundance, they made the long journey from Canaan to obtain food. While in Egypt, they met Joseph, whom they thought was dead.

Instead of settling the score, Joseph spoke kindly to them and recounted the ways God used their treatment of him for his good, for their good, and for the good of the Jewish people. He did not judge - words reflected in the reading we heard from Romans.

Even though Joseph had been thrown into the deepest pit, he emerged with extraordinary forgiveness toward those who wronged him. How could he do that? The way Joseph responded doesn't seem normal or even humanly possible, does it? So, what was

Joseph's secret? He showed an attitude of forgiveness: "Do not be distressed and do not be angry" He realized that God, in His sovereignty, would bring good out of the wrongs done to him and would use where ever Joseph was placed for good.

It doesn't mean he hadn't been hurt; it doesn't mean he had forgotten about what had been said and done; it doesn't mean the offenses didn't matter. Forgiveness isn't acting as if things don't have to change, or assuming that because God is merciful, God isn't grieved and angered by injustice.

On the contrary, the starting line of forgiveness is the acknowledgement of wrongdoing or of harm. Whenever we talk about the need for forgiveness, we must begin by recognizing the hurt, so we can realise we were created for good. We were created for love, equality, tenderness, and wholeness. And we are told that Joseph showed all of this by reassuring his brothers and speaking kindly to them.

Jesus speaks often about forgiveness, and he does so strongly.. Forgiveness is central to so many of his parables. Forgiveness is at the centre of the Lord's Prayer—we said it this morning - "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us".

This is a great reminder, I think, that we never come to God as people who have moved past needing his mercy, just as Joseph, all those years before, recognised. It is so easy to forget that. Jesus says we must always pray for forgiveness, have that attitude of forgiveness Joseph adopted.

And it's not just a weak, shallow forgiveness we need, either, a forgiveness that is just a kind of idea, a theory, a nice story we tell ourselves. No, the forgiveness we need to pray for is the forgiveness that actually changes the way we live, that transforms our lives. And we need to pass it forward too. Remember those words in the Lord's Prayer – 'As we also forgive others who have trespassed against us.' This part of the Lord's Prayer should make it impossible to pray this prayer as a familiar religious exercise. We

say it each week because forgiveness for us humans is hard and we need to be reminded every time we pray as Jesus taught us that we have to keep working at it. What we really need, this prayer teaches us, is the kind of real forgiveness from God that makes us forgive others.

Forgiveness is hard. It is costly. It's a slow, gradual way of living & we have to work at it over time. We don't develop the capacity to forgive to make us feel good. That may happen, but we forgive with God's help because God forgives us. We forgive so that we can look each other in the eye and live together. We forgive because God expects it of those who follow Christ.

Like Joseph we can choose to forgive or we can refuse to forgive and stay stuck. Joseph chose forgiveness, showing the unconditional love that we often speak of as Christians that restores relationships, reveals God's abundant grace and heals. As a community of faith, let's help one another to grow our capacity to forgive & be forgiven, thereby revealing God's abundant grace to one another and to the world.

### Meditation

One day I said "sorry", out loud, to the Earth.

"I'm sorry I trampled each day since my birth.

and burned, tarred and wasted the gifts in my hands

and passed off my greed as my Father's Commands."

"Dear child", said the Earth, "Since God shaped from my clay  
humanity – one with my creatures that play.

There's much of delight, as you till and protect,

and bring forth great wonders, and love and respect.

“But yes, for this moment, you’re way out of line:  
in selfish employ of your talents and time;  
with poverty even of three billion kin  
I’ve shown you already the mess we’re all in.

“You’ve hurt me: I lash out, but I keep no grudge  
and God who shapes all of us judges the judge.  
I just want the pain and extinction to stop  
I couldn’t care less now, who comes out on top!”

“Earth longs to forgive you” – a voice: was it Christ?

“When debt’s written off, shackles are sacrificed.

Forgiveness frees debtors to dance and rejoice:  
change course, choose forgiveness, know you still have choice!”

“One day I said sorry out loud to the Earth” (Rev David Coleman)  
[www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk)

### Prayers of Intercession

Our prayers of intercession are based on concepts of creation. I am  
sat under the pergola where I’ve planted a clematis and a  
grapevine, which were given to me by friends at Reigate URC. They  
are gradually growing to give shade and will hopefully give lovely  
dappled shade in future years,

Our prayers have a response: when I say ‘Send forth your Spirit’ I  
invite you to respond by saying ‘and renew us’.

Let us pray together.

### Creation intercessions *Based on Psalm 104*

Bless the Lord, O my soul.  
O Lord my God, you are very great.  
You are clothed with honour and majesty,  
wrapped in light as with a garment.  
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,  
you make the winds your messengers,  
fire and flame your ministers.

And yet you choose us to serve you here.  
Bless all those called to serve your Church,  
in particular, those who minister to this congregation.

Send forth your Spirit  
**and renew us.**

You set the earth on its foundations,  
so that it shall never be shaken.  
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;  
the waters stood above the mountains.

And so we pray for all those whose lives are afflicted when the earth  
shakes,  
or when the deep rises up to engulf homes.  
In uncertain times, may they know the deep peace of your love.

Send forth your Spirit  
**and renew us.**

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;  
they flow between the hills,  
giving drink to every wild animal.  
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;  
they sing among the branches.



For all those who work in conservation  
and for the fight to protect this world from greed and abuse,  
we ask for your strength and vision.

Send forth your Spirit  
**and renew us.**

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to use,  
to bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden the human heart,  
oil to make the face shine,  
and bread to strengthen the human heart.

For everyone that supplies our food,  
from farmer to cook,  
for the joy of eating well,  
we give you thanks,  
and pray for all those for whom the next meal is less certain,  
where joy is found simply in eating at all.  
May the world's resources be used and shared fairly.

Send forth your Spirit  
**and renew us.**

May the glory of the Lord endure forever;  
may the Lord rejoice in his works –  
who looks on the earth and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains and they smoke.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

**Praise the Lord!**  
**Amen and amen.**

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**Closing prayer:**

May the One to whom every knee shall bow and every tongue give  
praise, enfold you in loving kindness.  
May the One who was nailed to a tree for challenging the powers,  
give you grace to challenge the problems of this age.  
May the One who sustains Creation inspire such love in you, that  
you remain unsatisfied until the Earth is healed.

**Blessing:**

May the blessing of Jesus, who announced God's righteousness,  
of the Creator, who fills Earth with beauty,  
and of the Spirit, who nurtures awe,  
bless, inspire, and empower you. Amen

Hymns reproduced & streamed under CCLI 6025 & CCLI 21997 respectively

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