

**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2022 Pentecost 13**  
**Spring Flower Service Say it with Flowers**  
**Jeremiah 18: 1-11 & Matthew 18:21-35**

Today we celebrate the arrival of the Season of Spring through our Spring Flower Service. I suspect that for all of us our lives and spirits are refreshed with the new growth and the vibrancy of the colour of the flowers around us. Our vases have been removed from our cupboards and the spring flowers have been cut and placed in them pervading our homes with fragrances that sharpen our senses. Joy's orchid, given to her by her father 22 years ago, is going to flower again this year. After years of dormancy this is the third year in a row that it has now flowered. Nature has a life-giving force within it that we can but stand in awe of and marvel at.

We say many things with Flowers when we give them to someone else.

***What are some of those things?***

One of the things we say through the gift of flowers is. "I am sorry. Please forgive me."

Today Jesus spoke about forgiveness. Peter somehow plucked up the courage to ask Jesus how many times he has to forgive someone who hurts him. Then Peter answers his own question by suggesting seven times.

Peter actually thought he was being very generous for it was rabbinic teaching that people should forgive three times. In the opening chapters of the Book of the Prophet Amos it was deduced that God's forgiveness extends to three offences and that God visits the offender with punishment on the fourth. It was thought that people could not be more gracious than God.

By offering seven times, Peter thought he would receive Jesus' "Well done good and faithful servant." But Jesus came back with seventy times seven. In other words Jesus is saying that there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness.

After this Jesus told a parable of a servant who was himself forgiven a debt and then went out and showed no mercy whatsoever to someone who owed him money. This theme runs through all of the New Testament – in order to be forgiven one must also be prepared to forgive. We cannot hope to be forgiven if we ourselves will not forgive. In others words if we hold a grudge against someone else why should we complain when they hold a grudge against us?

In his book "Forgiving and Reconciling" Everett L Worthington Jr (IVP 2003 page 74 ff) has formulated a pyramid Model REACH where forgiveness is rooted in replacing negative emotions associated with anger, fear and unforgiveness with positive emotions associated with empathy (and perhaps sympathy, love, compassion and even romantic love) It helps people reach forgiveness through using five steps.

The First thing (R) we must do is to **Recall the Hurt**. When we are hurt, we often try to protect ourselves by denying our hurt. To heal, we must recall the hurt as objectively as we can. Don't rail against the person who hurt you, says Worthington, for that is a fruitless waste of time and effort. Instead admit that a wrong has been done.

The next stage is to **empathize**: (E) To empathize is to see things from another person's point of view. In order to forgive, try to feel what the other person is feeling. Even though it may be difficult, try to identify with what the other person is feeling. Empathy puts a human face on suffering.

Stage three A) is to offer the **altruistic gift of forgiveness**. Altruistic means "selfless concern for the well being of another." Think about how you have behaved and then consider a time when you were forgiven. When you remember how you felt then you may be willing to offer the same feeling to another.

Stage four: (C) is to **commit publicly to forgive**. To make your forgiveness public you are less likely to doubt it later. Tell a friend, partner, counsellor, or supervisor "I have forgiven..." which makes it far more relevant for you.

Stage five (H) is to **hold on to forgiveness**.

Don't slip back. To forgive is much healthier than holding a grudge.

When you don't forgive the one you hurt most is yourself. Healthy relationships are better than broken relationships.

Allow me to conclude by quoting from Desmond Tutu and his daughter Mpho Tutu in their book "Made for Goodness."

This is what they say:

Forgiveness is not a form of forgetting. It is rather, a profound form of remembering. When we forgive, we remember who and whose we are. We remember that we are creative beings modelled on a creative God.

When we forgive, we reclaim the power to create. We can create a new relationship with the person who has injured us. We can create a new story of ourselves. When we find the strength to forgive, we are no longer victims. We are survivors.

Forgiveness is not only a creative act; it is a liberating action. When we forgive the people who have harmed us, we liberate ourselves from the chains that bind us to our offender. We don't hold their offenses against them. And they exert no control over our moods, our disposition, or us. They have no further part in writing the story that we must tell of ourselves. Forgiveness liberates us. We are free." (Made for Goodness –Tutu page 74)