

Forgiveness

I like colour. I'm sure that we all do!

I love the sunshine and the way that it brings colour into our world.

During lockdown we were blessed with many colourful days when the sun shone from morning to evening. It was a blessing, helping to lift the mood of a really challenging situation.

God has created colour through sunlight, and he has given us eyes to see the most amazing spectrum of colours.

What's your favourite colour?

When we read the bible, we should take stock of how God uses colours to bring alive His story.

The garden of Eden was an explosion of colour.

Then, even despite human beings messing up the garden and His world, again God comes in colour to bring us a rainbow, a sign of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation – a covenant.

Follow God's people throughout their rich history...Joseph, a multi-coloured coat...the parting of the Red Sea, the abundance of milk and honey in Canaan, Solomon and his Temple, and then we have the coming of Christ.

There was nothing external to attract us to Jesus but what he brought to the world was an explosion of colour in his stories and healings and predictions of the coming kingdom.

But, more than that, his life was colourful...everything he did or touched brought colour, people's sight was restored, lame people walked, the deaf could hear and lepers were healed and even the dead raised to life. What colour! Then he proclaimed a gospel of forgiveness.

He entered the lives of individuals and proclaimed that they were set free, that God had forgiven them completely and that they should go and live as forgiven people.

What colour he brought to people's lives!

2000 years later we, as the church, are inheritors of this same colourful picture that Christ brought into the world, and he calls us to be fellow artists,

to continue his painting, to add to his painting our own colourful brush strokes.

One of the great privileges that I have had of ministering here this last three and half years, is meeting people of colour and I'm not talking about race but I'm talking about characters. I'm talking about the type of people they were and what they will be remembered for.

Over those last few weeks, we have lost two incredible individuals, who had a great life, who ran a great race, and who we trust are now in God's eternal care.

They were both people who brought colour into others' lives. Now, like us, they would have had their weaknesses and faults, but yet there was something so lovely about their lives that shone for all to see.

The first is Eliz, I'm glad that I knew her before her stroke and she was always on the go, darting here and there, sharing her conversations with other people, loving her family and the Guild, and in her own unique way being a part of Cadder Church.

Sadly, for 18 months, Eliz was confined to her bed in a Nursing Home because of a stroke, but even there she could bring colour into the lives of others.

The second person is Ossie. He was everybody's friend because he shone so much light and joy into other people's lives and despite his failing mobility and going round on his scooter, he had an infectious and contagious spirit that brought the best out in people and I think that is what Eliz and Ossie had, they had a spirit that brought the best out in people.

They were people of faith. A faith that they were comfortable with. Their faith would have been developed over many years at Cadder Church for Jesus said that those who remain in me shall bear fruit. They certainly bore much fruit.

Both of them knew the importance of faith, both of them enjoyed praying.

Over the last month, we have been thinking about what it really means to be a Christian, to follow Jesus. Matthew's gospel gives us great pointers in how to be an effective disciple and Christian.

In Jesus we see the most colourful person who ever lived.

Today, we arrive at the summit of his teaching. We've been climbing a mountain over the last month, and looking at issues of peace making and taking up our cross and self-denial and now we come to the ultimate test.

The ultimate test of a Christian is forgiveness, and the context to our passage today is Peter coming to Jesus and asking how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?

Why, is Peter asking this question?

Why is he trying to justify himself?

Who had sinned against him?

Why was he convicted about forgiveness?

He would have seen in Jesus' teaching and life, a colourful grace that he had never met before. He would see Jesus being magnanimous in his dealings with everyone who had come his way. He would have seen tax collectors accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven, ordinary people outside the church of his day, brought into relationship with God. He would have seen adulterers forgiven and children brought close to God and blessed. He would have seen women given a new status in life. Now he wants to know the ultimate question, OK Jesus, answer me this, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister?

Notice, it is not a stranger he is forgiving, it is someone in his close family or in his fellowship. It is someone he knows well and whom he works with – lives with, walks with.

How many times should I forgive someone in the church could be our question today? Couldn't it? There must be a limit to how much I can forgive?

You see up to that point, a Jewish person would set the target of three times. If someone wronged you then you could be gracious to them three times, three yellow cards and the fourth time is a red card. Then you could cut them out of your life. That sounds good!

Peter, would have known this rule well, and so he takes it a step further, he doubles the number and adds one and thinks he has done well.

Before Jesus could answer, he says seven times.

I can see Jesus smiling at Peter, and shaking his head and saying to him, *no Peter not seven times but seventy times seven, in other words, there is no number, forgiveness is not a number Peter, it's a way of life, and if you are to follow me and be my disciple, then you must forgive all day long, every day for the rest of your life.*

You see, this is the ultimate test of your faith Peter – can we forgive those who have sinned against us?

Then Jesus took the matter further, he paints a colourful picture story to Peter and the disciples, a word picture, a story about three men.

One is the King, powerful, and wealthy and who has lent money to a self-made man. This man himself would have been powerful in his domain. Perhaps a politician, or a tax farmer as they were called, leasing out land and making a profit.

Who he was is not important, what is important is that he is in a big mess. He cannot pay back the King and we are talking about an extravagant sum of money, the NIV version puts it, 10,000 BAGS OF GOLD...something that would be impossible to pay back and this man has not the means. This is someone in the category of Richard Branson, a super wealthy individual.

But he nothing left. We are not told why? Gambling, wild living, wastefulness...perhaps... but he has messed up and when the King comes back looking for his money and this man is summoned to appear before him, he has nothing to give the King. He cannot pay back!

So, the King has every right to hold this man to account and sadly the man's family is also caught up in his bad management, and as he is responsible for his family, they all come under the judgement of the King, and the King decrees that everything be stripped from this man, everything he owns, everything that belongs to him, even his wife and children, be sold to pay the debt.

The man falls on knees and begs for mercy and the King is a merciful man and he cancels the man's debt. The man is set free, and his family; penniless they may be but yet the opportunity to start afresh.

One would have thought that he would have been delighted with his fresh start, he would have enjoyed his freedom; but no, immediately he went looking and searching out for those who owed him money.

He was going to make others pay for his mistakes, perhaps he saw them as being part of the problem, and so he finds a poor man who owes him a 100 silver coins. In comparison with what he had owed it would be small fry, but perhaps to the poor man he had chased up this was a large sum – it's all relative, and so he demands that this man pays him back immediately, and when this poor man falls on his knees and pleads for mercy he ignores him and has this poor man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt back. How can you pay the debt back when you are in prison?

When others heard of the story, they informed the King and the King was so angry.

The King called him in and he said to him, “Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I have had on you!” and so he threw him to jail to suffer until he could pay back all that he owed.

Jesus finishes with the words, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from the heart.”

So, what do we learn from this story?

We notice that Jesus is teaching a parable about the Kingdom of Heaven. He begins with the words: *The Kingdom of heaven is like this...* this is why Jesus came to earth, to bring the Kingdom of heaven into the world, and this is its beginning as he shares his colourful stories about God.

This is a multi-coloured story.

This is telling us that God is like the King, he is powerful and he has the authority to do as He pleases. He gave the money to this man who abused his gift, who was now in debt, and he has the authority to punish this man because he wasted the King's generosity. But because the man pleads for mercy, so the King forgives, and this is a picture of God.

He is gracious and merciful to all who come to him. He has blessed us with the gift of life and one day, he will ask us what we did with it.

We all owe God a huge debt, that is why we pray *forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*.

We simply cannot pay the debt but God has made a way for us!

He will never turn anyone away who genuinely asks for forgiveness. This is the God that Christians worship. Jesus is telling them, that His Father is

merciful, and he is gracious, and he is touched when people fall before him and so in our story – he forgives the man.

Do you believe in the forgiveness of God?

Really believe it?

Do you allow that forgiveness to touch your heart and transform your life? This is what the story is all about. It begins with God's forgiveness to us and then our forgiveness to others.

You see these are two sides of the same coin.

When we really meet with the grace and love of God, then our lives will become transformed by his light and we will become the most colourful of all people in that God's light will shine from us.

That's what Jesus said, *that those who follow him will be a light on the hill, salt in the earth.*

They will be colourful because by their actions and their lives, they will demonstrate the forgiveness and mercy of God to the world.

This is what churches should be like.

They have to be a place that looks like Christ.

Mission begins here when his people are people who have received God's forgiveness and who thirst and hunger to forgive others.

We are not going to win people over with intellectual arguments about God until they see in our lives that God is real and that he has forgiven us, so that we can forgive others.

This is mission and this is where it begins and ends.

Returning to our dearly departed friends Eliz and Ossie, just for a moment, for their memory will live on and their testimony to the Christian faith will be in the hearts of their families, friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ and we will be inspired and encouraged by their faith and to be like them and so let God's colour shine from our lives.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.