

SERMON NOTES Sunday 6th September 2026

sunnysidechurch

Theme: **The reality of forgiveness**

Passages: **Matthew 18.15-20**

Some of the main themes from the sermon

The passage in its context

Much of Jesus' teaching was through parables. He told a story and invited his hearers to 'go figure', to draw their own conclusion about what the parable asks of them. Today's Bible reading is very direct teaching that is settled between two parables, one about God's care for the vulnerable and a second how people respond to God's forgiveness. It seems fair to assume that Matthew put it there for a reason. Let's try and see why.

God's care for the 'little ones'

Matthew takes the story of the lost sheep (which Luke uses in conjunction with the prodigal son and the lost coin) and gives it a slightly different treatment. He is emphasising God's care for 'the little ones' and the believer's responsibility not to let any of them perish, in particular by leading them astray.

The consequences of choosing not to forgive a debt

The reading is followed by the parable of the unmerciful servant, which shows the peril of a servant who was treated mercifully but didn't offer mercy to someone in his power.

Setting matters straight: a four stage process

It is important to be clear about what this passage is **NOT** about. It is not about a circumstance where there are safeguarding issues or where the law has been broken. From the context, it seems that Matthew is talking about believers' responsibility to nurture each other (like the man who owned the sheep) and to forgive each other (unlike the unmerciful servant). And today's reading is an intensely practical 4 stage programme to mend relationships in a Christian community.

Stage 0: reflect on the issue you are concerned about

Stage 1: speak to the person who has done wrong

Stage 2: go with one or two others to act as witnesses

Stage 3: treat them as someone who is not a member of the community.

I think this all requires a bit of unpacking. Firstly, our most common instinctive reactions are not an option. We are not to blank the person, fester internally or gossip about the. However it leaves questions unanswered.

What sort of 'sin' are we talking about?

What if you're mistaken in your judgement?

What does forgiveness look like?

Why do we need to forgive?

Forgiving is not easy and is not the same as 'kissing and making up'

There are cases where forgiveness may be very difficult (you may have to forgive seventy times seven for the same thing - see v22).

What about Sunnyside?

This all seems a long way from our everyday experience. This is for a couple of reasons, I think. Firstly we live in a society where we keep each other at arm's length. We are polite and often don't say what we are thinking. Maybe we choose instead to speak about people behind their backs or just bottle up our thoughts and feelings. Secondly, our church community is made up largely of people quite similar to us (unlike the early church). We often carry the same preconceptions, which go unchallenged. However our particular perspectives could themselves be offensive to a person with a different background.

A few takeaways

Let us remember again the debt of gratitude we have to God for loving us just as we are.

Let us reflect on any deep seated anger we have towards another person and reflect on what God is prompting us to do about it.

Let us ask ourselves if anyone could have cause to have be angry with us

Some questions for thought and discussion this week:

1. **Reflect on a time when you have been in conflict with a fellow believer. How did you and they handle the situation? How was it resolved, if at all? How would you approach things differently if you had your time again? Discuss this with your house group, if you think it appropriate.**
2. **Our perspectives are influence by our own influences. Think about the 'social graces' sheet attached to these notes, used as a resource in diocesan safeguarding training. How might you view the world and other people differently if one of the metrics (such as your race or sexuality) were different? How would this affect your faith? Might this bring you into dispute with other believers?**
3. **Google 'The Poison Tree' by William Blake. Does it resonate with you?**
4. **Talk about any other issues the sermon (or these notes) raised for you.**

Quote of the week

'I was angry with my friend; I told my wrath, my wrath did end.

I was angry with my foe: I told it not, my wrath did grow.'

From 'The Poison Tree' by William Blake

SOCIAL GRACES

DEFINITION

The social graces is a framework for understanding aspects of identity and how they shape our practices. It makes aspects of identity and asks practitioners (normally therapists, but also teachers, social workers, etc.) to be aware of how their identity influences their thinking.

MEANING

- Ⓒ = Gender, Gender Identity, Geography, Generation
- Ⓓ = Race, Religion
- Ⓐ = Age, Ability, Appearance
- Ⓒ = Class, Culture, Caste
- Ⓔ = Education, Ethnicity, Economics
- Ⓔ = Spirituality, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation