



**Call to Worship – Isaiah 55: verse 10**

Our desire, our need, our yearning draws us together to worship God. Unexplainable, unimaginable, unbelievable, incomprehensible love, pulls at our heart strings, tugs at our emotions, turns our eyes beyond the seeing. All-encompassing God, just as we are, we come. **Amen**

**Hymn – STF 99 – All creatures of our God and king,**

All creatures of our God and King,  
lift up your voice and with us sing,  
alleluia, alleluia !  
O burning sun with golden beam,  
and silver moon with softer gleam :  
*O praise him, O praise him,*  
*alleluia, alleluia, alleluia !*

O rushing wind that is so strong,  
and clouds that sail in heaven along,  
O praise him, alleluia !  
O rising morn, in praise rejoice ;  
and lights of evening, find a voice :

O flowing water, pure and clear,  
make music for your Lord to hear,  
sing 'Praise him, alleluia !'  
O fire, so masterful and bright,  
giving to all both warmth and light :

Dear mother earth, who day by day  
unfolds rich blessings on our way,  
O praise him, alleluia !  
The flowers and fruits that bloom and grow,  
let them his glory also show :

**Prayer of Praise and Adoration**

**Creator God,** you made us in your image, yet each one of us is unique; you made us in your image, yet you gave us freedom to be ourselves. We praise you for our differences, for the variety of our gifts, and our many expressions of love. Through our praise we celebrate our diversity and rejoice in our differences.

**Prayer of adoration and thanksgiving**

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, it is for me – for me! – and may I know it deep within. With overflowing hearts, hear our prayer.

**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession**

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. (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.**

Watch on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0d3gO6qDLNA>

And all who are of tender heart  
forgiving others, take your part,  
sing, 'Praise him, alleluia !'  
All who long pain and sorrow bear,  
praise God, and on him cast your care :

And now, most kind and gentle death,  
waiting to hush our fading breath,  
O praise him, alleluia !  
You homeward lead the child of God,  
and Christ the Lord the way has trod :

Let all things their creator bless,  
and worship him in humbleness ;  
O praise him, alleluia !  
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,  
and praise the Spirit, Three in One :

St Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)  
*translated* William Henry Draper (1855–1933)  
(*alt.*)

**Scripture:** Matthew 18: 21 – 35

### ***The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant***

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold<sup>[b]</sup> was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

### **Reflection**

How often should I forgive the one who sins *against me*? There should be a limit, so Peter pitches ‘seven times’ – which sounds generous, and is more than suggested by contemporary rabbis who thought three would be enough. But Jesus tells him to stop counting. Forgiveness is a lifestyle not an equation. The numbers plunge us into the Old Testament where we come face to face with the logic of Jesus’ response. Peter’s number echoes the seven-fold vengeance threatened to those who harm Cain. Jesus’ seventy times seven echoes the Jubilee at the heart of Old Testament life. Those living the Jubilee are perpetually forgiving. To illustrate this, Jesus tells a parable that comes from the everyday world of life in the empire – the very world that the Jubilee was meant to regulate. It is a story at once funny and serious. The amounts owed make the story fantastical and amusing. The attitude of the slave is chilling as we realise Jesus is talking about Peter – and us.

A talent was the largest unit of currency (actually a measure of weight, about 30kg, usually of silver) worth 6,000 denarii. A denarius was a good day’s wage for a labourer. Myria (10,000, from where we get the word ‘myriad’) was the biggest number in Greek. So here Jesus is saying that this slave owed the biggest number of the largest unit of currency to his master. We might say that he owed zillions!

Unable to pay such a debt, the slave throws himself on his master’s mercy. The master’s heart goes out to him (‘took pity’, v.27, is the same term that is used of Jesus in 9.36) and he writes off the entire amount. Wow! Having experienced such grace, the slave then demands that a colleague pay back the few pounds he owes him and throws him in jail when he doesn’t.

Don’t we cheer when the first slave gets his comeuppance! Yet, like Nathan’s parable of the poor man’s lamb (2 Samuel 12), we are cheering our own downfall. This, says Jesus, is the outcome of Peter’s calculus. The parable serves to illustrate the foundational principle of relationships among disciples – namely that they are built on perpetual forgiveness.

## Prayers of Intercession

Jesus' parables inspire us to pray for those who forgive us, for big things and small...

for those who do not forgive, no matter what...

for those who do not know how to forgive...

for those who do not want to forgive...

for those who have not been forgiven.

God of forgiveness, for them all, we pray.

And we pray for all those suffering for any reason, whether it be illness, anxiety, depression, an abusing partner or any reason that causes them to feel less than the perfect person God has made them. And we continue to pray for all suffering COVID-19 and I ask you to pray please for my 5 year-old grandson Issa, currently in Ipswich Hospital with suspected Coronavirus. **Amen.**

## The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those who 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**

**Hymn – STF 83 – Praise my soul, the King of heaven**

Watch on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c>

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| 1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven ;<br>to his feet thy tribute bring.<br>Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,<br>who like thee his praise should sing ?<br>Praise him ! Praise him !<br>Praise the everlasting King ! | 3 Father-like, he tends and spares us ;<br>well our feeble frame he knows ;<br>in his hands he gently bears us,<br>rescues us from all our foes.<br>Praise him ! Praise him !<br>Widely as his mercy flows.    |
| 2 Praise him for his grace and favour<br>to his people in distress ;<br>praise him, still the same for ever,<br>slow to chide, and swift to bless.<br>Praise him ! Praise him !<br>Glorious in his faithfulness.           | 4 Angels in the height, adore him ;<br>ye behold him face to face ;<br>sun and moon, bow down before him,<br>dwellers all in time and space.<br>Praise him ! Praise him !<br>Praise with us the God of grace ! |

Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)

## Blessing

Go with the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen