

## ***How many people work here?***

*Genesis 50<sup>15-21</sup>; Psalm 103<sup>8-13</sup>; Romans 14<sup>1-12</sup>; Matthew 18<sup>21-35</sup>*

*If we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord.  
[Romans 14<sup>8</sup>]*

I have to confess that I found myself agreeing with the Archbishop of Canterbury this week (or whichever of his Chaplains prepared the Press Release). It said (when letting us know that Churches were not included in the restrictions of gatherings of 6 persons):

*Worship is the work of God – not a social gathering – and gives strength to love and serve.*

The work of God separates into two parts – what he does and what we are to do.

### ✘ **Our Part – to forgive:**

As human beings we are generally motivated by self-preservation. That certainly seems to be the case when Isaac dies and Joseph's brothers begin to worry about what happened to them. There is the real sense in the text that the brothers made up their fathers' last words, **say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.**

It isn't even enough for us to justify our misdirected thoughts and actions by hiding behind God, who will sort everything out. Joseph was magnanimous when he said, **even though you intended to harm me, God intended it for good.**

How like the unmerciful servant we can be. We expect God grace, we expect God's favour, we expect God's forgiveness – and we have the arrogance to think that it stops with us.

Our WORK (and it is hard work) is to be channels of the same forgiveness we have received. How many times, Peter asked: **As many as seven times?** But Jesus said, **not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven**

**times.** The end of the parable told us of the punishment of the unmerciful servant and then, to make things absolutely clear, says: **so my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or your sister from your heart.**

Is anyone unclear about the WORK we have to do!

### ✘ **God's Part – to forgive and to judge:**

Now to the nice bit – the good filling in the sandwich that is this sermon.

The Psalmist talks about God, **full of compassion and mercy; he has not dealt with us according to our sins; as the heavens are high above the earth so great is his mercy; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he set our sins from us; the Lord is merciful.** That's the work of God and it does us good, it makes us feel good!

We know that God in Christ has absorbed our sin and guilt and liberated our souls and our consciences – he did this freely!

What will God say about how we react to this gift. Note that Paul says, **we will all stand before the judgement seat of God.** On the Day of Judgement, no Oscars will be handed out for acting like you have forgiven others! The God who sees what we do, who knows our motivation, who reads our very hearts and thoughts will reward integrity, the integrity that knows every time we point a finger at someone else we point three back at ourselves!

God's work in forgiveness is done and his work in judgement will come!

This is a place of work! There are no passengers, no holidays and no retirement – we are in it together: to be forgiven and to forgive. **If we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord.**

Pope John XXIII was once asked, when showing someone round the Vatican, 'How many people work here?' He replied, 'About half!'

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