



Pews News

United Benefice of Shenstone & Stonnall



14th Sunday after Trinity – 13th September 2020

**The Lord be with you
And also with you**

Many of you have expressed concern over the changes in law regarding the number of people who may meet if they are from different households. At the time of writing this newsletter (Friday 11th September) these changes do not affect the number of people who can attend an act of public worship. There is still a limit on the number who can attend a life event service (wedding, funeral or Baptism). The number attending one of these services is limited to 30. If you need any more information please do contact me.

With all Blessings

Rev Liz

01543 480286



**Collect Prayer –
14th Sunday after Trinity**

Merciful God,
your Son came to save us
and bore our sins on the cross:
may we trust in your mercy
and know your love,
rejoicing in the righteousness
that is ours through Jesus Christ
our Lord.

Opening Times and Services - St John the Baptist, Shenstone

Sunday 13 th September	10.30 am to noon 11.00 – 11.30	Church Open Morning Worship led by Rdr Alan Bateman
Sunday 20 th September	10.30 am to noon 11.00 – 11.30	Church Open Communion led by Rev Liz and Curate Graham Wigley
Sunday 27 th September	10.30 am to noon 11.00 – 11.30	Church Open Morning Worship led by Rdr Ray Chamberlain

Opening Times and Services - St Peter's Church Stonnall

Sunday 13 th September	10.00 – Noon 10.30 – 11.00	Church Open Communion led by Rev Liz and Rdr Ray Chamberlain
Sunday 20 th September	10.00 – Noon 10.30 – 11.00	Church Open Morning Worship led by Patsy Toulouse
Sunday 27 th September	10.00 – Noon 10.30 – 11.00 12.15 pm	Church Open Communion led by Rev John A Private Baptism

For those of you who are unable to get to church at the moment a service is available on <https://vimeo.com/456523605> or either Church's FaceBook page.

Morning Prayer continues to be posted on FaceBook

Communion in our churches

We have now been given permission to celebrate Communion in our churches as long as we follow the guidelines about these services. The documentation for this is quite detailed and some careful thought and preparation has been undertaken to enable Communion to be safely offered. The Communion services will look and feel very different to the services you have been used too.

Whenever possible Communion will be offered at our churches on alternate weeks and you will have noticed that the pattern is different to that you have been used to in the past.

In line with guidelines, only Communion wafers will be distributed, the priest leading the Communion service will take both wine and wafer.

It's recognised that this is a source of pain for many of you; however we are under authority and must comply with specific instructions from the Church of England. The full instruction document may be found on the Church of England website;

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

If you don't have access to the internet and would like a copy of the document please do let Rev Liz or one of the Church Wardens know and a copy will be printed for you.

Due to the restrictions on space and to ensure the safety of all concerned it is not possible for Communion to be taken at the Communion Rail. Communion will be brought to you while you remain in your pew. Communion will take place during the half hour led worship times.

If you are unable to get to Church and would like Communion to be brought to you, please do contact Rev Liz and arrangements will be made. Please be aware that certain conditions apply but she will talk these through with you.

St Peter's Church – booking in

If you've attended worship at St Peter's Church Stonnall this week (13th September) and intend to come next week (20th September) please 'book your place for next week' before you leave church today. If you forget to do this please call or email Curate Graham Wigley on

Telephone 0121 352 0899 or

Email; curate@shenstoneandstonnall.co.uk

At the risk of sounding like a theatre box office 'the booking line will close Friday 18th September'.

Joyfully, we are at capacity at St Peter's Church. We want to be able to welcome all who would like to worship with us, and we are very willing to run a second service if this is required.



News from the Church of England – current as at 11th September 2020

- Public acts of worship within church are unaffected by the recent changes to numbers in a group allowed to meet. However social distancing guidelines apply and it is mandatory that worshippers wear a mask while inside the building.
- Weddings, funerals and baptisms are still permitted to take place within churches, subject to certain conditions. For life events only 30 people may attend.
- <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

Our Prayers – current as at 11th September 2020

- We pray for all our Government, our Bishops and Clergy. We pray especially for the Prime Minister and our Government as decisions continue to be made.
- We thank you for the Queen and the Royal Family
- We pray for our country as we cope with the lifting of some restrictions. Protect us and help us to make the right choices.
- We pray for areas of our world where violence and disruption is rife.
- We hold our clergy, Church Wardens and PCC members in prayer as they continue to work through the guidance and changes required to enable our churches to open.
- We pray for the two schools in our Benefice.
- A number of our church and community members are recovering from surgery or need of healing please think of
 - Bill Proctor, Joan Terry, Peter Richardson, Pat McQueen, Ena Wale, Judy Hanson, Ken Liddington, Isobel Ensor, and Maisie Birley

Contributions for our local foodbanks.

If you would like to make contribution to our food banks the following collection points are available;

For the Lichfield Food Bank (Shenstone Church) –

The Vicarage, St Johns Hill, a container is in the porchway

7 Church Close, Shenstone, a container is outside the door.

For the Thomas Project (Stonnall Church) –

1 Lazy Hill, a box is inside the porch

Thank you for your generous contributions. Both foodbank projects can only take gifts of non-perishable items, so please no fresh goods.

Church Finances

Although both our churches are closed for public worship and private prayer time our bills still need to be paid. Thank you to those of you who continue to give by standing order and those who have posted donations through the Vicarage door. If you do usually give by envelope on the plate you will have received a letter with a supply of envelopes in to enable you to continue your donations during our shut down time. You can either save these up till we're able to reopen or contact one of the wardens and they'll arrange for it to be collected from you.

APCM

Provisional dates for the APCM meetings are as follows

St Peter's Church - 11th October, after the morning service

St John the Baptist Church – 22nd October, 7.30 pm in the Church Hall.

If guidelines change these dates and times may alter.

Friends of Shenstone Tower

Friends of Shenstone Tower are a group from Shenstone village who have got together and formed a charity to renovate fully, and open to the public Shenstone's old church tower. They have secured funding of £350,000 to complete these renovations. One condition of the funding is that community support for project must be assessed. Please would you take part in this assessment? Some questionnaires are at the back of church (St John the Baptist) please do take one and complete it. Once its completed either put it back in the folder or hand it in at the Parish Council Office.

Graham Wigley - At long last a date for Graham's ordination has been finalised. It will be at Lichfield Cathedral, 26th September at 11.00 am. Due to restrictions the service is sadly a private one and Graham is allowed two guests only. However its planned that the service will be live streamed and once these details are available they will be made known.

Graham and Rev Liz will visit both churches on Sunday 27th September to enable both congregations to pray for him and wish him well.

St Johns Hall

St Johns Hall has been closed since lockdown restrictions came into being. Over the lockdown period some major refurbishment works have been undertaken. A new kitchen has been installed (made possible by a legacy donation from Joan Burney of £5000, a generous donation Shenstone Parish Council which has covered the cost of buying the units, donations from Friday Friends and Shenstone WI) and a new ramp to enable wheelchair and pushchair access. It's thought that the hall will be open again from mid-September, although usage will be subject to restrictions. We are very excited to open the hall once more for community use.

Veronica Raybould has taken on the role of Church Hall Administration and she will be the person to contact for all bookings. Her contact details are 01543 480756 vbraybould@gmail.com.

Our readings for this Sunday are;

Romans 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith,^[a] but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. ² Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³ Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord^[b] is able to make them stand. ⁵ Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶ Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God. ⁷ We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister?^[c] Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister?^[d] For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.^[e] ¹¹ For it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to^[f] God.”

¹² So then, each of us will be accountable to God.^[g]

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church^[a] sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven^[b] times. ²³ “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents^[c] was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii;^[d] and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister^[e] from your heart.”

Songs for today – Make me a channel of your peace, 10000 Reasons

Thoughts for today – Alan Bateman

Being let down, hurt, betrayed, insulted, physically injured or worse as the result of someone else's behaviour is all too common. We're all likely to have experienced one or the other. At best, it's bewildering; at worst it's shattering. If there is no satisfactory resolution, then consequences linger for both parties - broken relationships, family disruption, feuds, terrorism, wars - for days, months, a lifetime, down the ages.

Consequences that so often arise from lack of forgiveness (coupled with its inseparable partner repentance).

In the reading from Romans, Paul has been discussing judgment and accountability. In the gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus has been working through responsibility and forgiveness with his disciples. Ok Lord, chips in Peter "how often should I forgive someone who's wronged me?". Jesus replies that forgiveness isn't a commodity to be totted up on a calculator. It is so limitless that it can't even be quantified.

It's like this, he says. A servant in an absurd amount of debt (the whole budget of the province) is released from it absolutely by his king. But that servant in turn then refuses to forgive a fellow servant what is a reasonable debt (a day's wages). When the king gets to hear about it, that first servant is severely punished. And quite right too, we might think. What a heartless man. No one should behave like that. The king was fully justified in his harsh retaliation.

So far so good. Then, just as we're contentedly nodding in agreement with a neat story about just desserts, Jesus slips in the left hook – the punch line. "*and that's what my heavenly father will do to you, unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart*".

What's that again? Does it mean that if I do not forgive those who injure me, God will withhold his forgiveness? Is divine forgiveness *conditional* on my letting go of grudges and hurts or worse? After all that's what that tricky line in the Lord's prayer says isn't it? '*forgive us our sins... as we forgive those who sin against us*'

I'm not sure it's quite like that. Let's take a couple of points from that parable. Firstly, about God: Jesus is saying that human forgiveness is rooted in divine forgiveness. The king forgives an incalculable amount. There is simply no way to measure the extent of God's generosity when it comes to forgiving.

The second point is about us. There's a gap in the parable – an unexpected omission in the immediate response of the servant to being forgiven his crazy debt. No rejoicing, no gratitude. No relief that his wife and children have been spared imprisonment. No reflection about the meaning of freedom. All we hear is that he immediately refuses the pleas of a colleague.

The first servant has not 'discovered', has not recognised, forgiveness. There was a hint of this in his initial begging to the king. Even though in inconceivable debt, he still makes his case on the basis of quid pro quo: "I'll pay you everything".

He imagines he is dealing with the king on the basis of *equity / justice – a trade-off*. What he actually receives, but never grasps, is *mercy*. So how can he see himself as in the same situation as the second servant? Showing mercy is beyond his comprehension.

Jesus wants us to know that forgiveness has to do with something quite different from deserved justice. Nothing to do with quid pro quo.

Forgiveness is a matter of heart-felt understanding. If confrontation has to happen, it must always be with forgiveness in mind.

Yes, but we might still think: *'forgive us our sins.... as we forgive those who sin against us'* That still sounds like a trade-off with God. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. My being forgiven depends on how much I forgive. We forgive in order to earn our forgiveness in return.

Well, let's recall that the Lord's Prayer is as much a statement as it is a petition. The statement element of that line is one of balance (of allegiance). Saying that, unlike that first servant, I get the principle that I need to understand mercy in order to show mercy. I get the principle that I need to understand mercy in order to receive mercy. The two go together; hand in hand. Perhaps a working paraphrase would be *'... you forgive us our sins – and accordingly we too choose to forgive those who sin against us'*

Does it help to think of forgiveness as like the air in my lungs? I can only inhale the next lungful when I've breathed out the last one. If I insist on not doing breathing, I'll suffocate. I breathe in God's forgiveness; I breathe out my own. Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. It's a continuous cycle of action and understanding.

If my heart (my spiritual lungs, if you will) is open, able and willing to forgive others, then it will be open to receive God's love and forgiveness. If we don't practise forgiveness amongst ourselves, then we haven't grasped what God in Jesus was up to. Nor that the whole business of forgiveness started with God. If we don't live out forgiveness, then we are denying the very basis of new life in Christ.

All the same, practising forgiveness can involve a lot of emotional homework. One-sided homework too, in that there might never be the easing balance of repentance by the other party. We can be left holding the baby. The deserved judgment and consequences for the offender may not arise.

But forgiving isn't asking us to exonerate the offender. It does not equal condoning offending behaviour. It does not mean that nothing has changed - actions have consequences. It does not equate to forgetting - it's more to do with reaction to what you can't forget. It does not necessarily lead to liking or trusting someone - once bitten, twice shy. Nonetheless, the parable has an edge which we can't over-sanitise. Even though, sometimes, the best we might manage is to ask to transfer the responsibility of forgiveness and resolution to God. But, whatever the case: breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. Give allegiance to the life-giving principle of forgiveness; the statement of allegiance in the Lord's Prayer. *'... you forgive us our sins – and accordingly we too choose to forgive those who sin against us'*.

Jesus called people to imitate, participate in, collaborate with the compassion of God. The risen Christ has that firm expectation of us.

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