

St Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church
Moore Street, Adelaide

Reflection for the 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Forgiving those who sin against us

We have heard a lot about forgiveness of sins this year, especially when I have been preaching. But the Gospel readings for last Sunday and this Sunday call any blithe assumptions about God's forgiveness into real question. As we have learnt, much will depend on our own choices - whether or not we accept all that God offers us.

In the case of forgiveness, it can be said that when we offer someone forgiveness ourselves, we are building a bridge between earth and heaven. Because each one of us is a sinner, the only way we can pass from earth to heaven is over the bridge of God's forgiveness. Jesus said that if we forgive others our Father in heaven will forgive our trespasses. In other words, the surest way of ensuring our passage to heaven is to forgive others from our hearts.

If we cannot forgive someone on earth, we cannot expect or assume any forgiveness for ourselves from God. This is simple for us to contemplate, but far more difficult for us to implement. There are times when to offer forgiveness seems too difficult to imagine. It is then that we need to remember the teaching of today's Gospel. Is it correct for us to harden our attitude towards another person? God calls us to be magnanimous and awake to our own shortcomings in our dealings with others. Eventually we need to leave the Garden of Eden so that our ability to live by Jesus' teachings becomes a matter of choice.

In today's Gospel, we should study the detail offered. The first workers are forgiven a huge debt, while a second person who is owed relatively little is not prepared to forgive the debt, and is severely punished. The teaching from Jesus is plain: If we do not forgive one another a debt, neither will God forgive our many debts or trespasses. It is entirely up to us whether or not we decide to forgive another.

This teaching is restated in the Lord's Prayer when we pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." If we fail to offer forgiveness, we cannot expect forgiveness from God.

Jesus challenges us seriously in this Gospel. Given that our society is too often disinclined to forgive certain misdemeanours and sins, it makes our own decisions about forgiveness difficult ... but not impossible.

Fr Graeme Kaines