

**Opening Music:** 'Jesu, Joy of Man's desiring' 3 mins 10secs  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNra2CE-sdE>

**Regular Opening Music** by Lizzie Hornby: 'Its still not going to rain'

**Welcome** to everyone here today; whether you have been attending for a long time, for a few times and especially if you are joining us for the 1st time today – welcome! ... however you are feeling: sad, worried, happy or curious... whatever your faith or none... you are welcome here. The theme of our Services this month is 'Healing' and today's looks at 'Forgiveness' and how it can be healing, both for the recipient and for the person who is able to forgive. There are differing points of view expressed, each valid in its own way. I hope that there will be something meaningful for each one to take away and ponder upon.

As is our custom, we start by lighting our Chalice Flame, as a symbol of our free religious faith. And if you are joining in on Zoom, and have a candle nearby, you may like to light it with us now.

**Chalice Lighting:** based on words by  
Paulo Renato Garrochinho of the Liberal & Unitarian Christians of Portugal

Breath of Life that some call God; Breath of freedom and forgiveness;  
You give us life and sustain us in our life's struggles;  
You give meaning to our existence;  
You make it possible for us to live and pray together, in spite of our differences and singularities;  
We thank You, Breath of freedom and forgiveness, for in You and through You respect and love can exist, always in spite of us;  
In You and through You, always we have the power to dream and to work for a new world, a world of freedom, love and forgiveness.

**Opening Words:** This was written by Erna Colebrook, one of our members now living in Cumbria with her daughter. Erna keeps in touch and sometime ago, sent me this email in which she wrote "A while ago I watched a T.V. programme where the political problems of Colombia were discussed. Someone said " The price of peace is forgiveness" I thought it was so beautifully put that I wrote it down.

She referred to Archbishop Desmond Tutu's writing on Forgiveness, probably thinking of these words of his "To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest... It is also a process that does not exclude hatred and anger. These emotions are all part of being human. You should never hate yourself for hating the terrible things done... the depth of your love is shown by the extent of your anger. However, when I talk of forgiveness, I mean the belief that you can come out the other side a better person... than the one being consumed by anger and hatred. Remaining in that state locks you in a state of victimhood, making you almost dependent on the perpetrator. If you can find it in yourself to forgive then you are no longer chained to the perpetrator." Erna closed by saying. "We must always forgive the people we love most."

**1st Hymn:** Purple 62 'Here we have gathered'

**2mins 47s**

**Prayers: 'For Others'** Rev Cliff Reed

We hold in our thoughts and prayers all those of this fellowship, all those of our families, our wider kindred, and the wider community outside our doors, who are in need of solace.

For the sick, may there be healing and strength;  
For the distressed in mind, may there be peace and tranquility of Spirit;  
For the embittered may there be reconciliation and a new beginning;  
For the despairing, may there be faith and rekindled joy;  
For the fearful may there be courage and unquenchable hope.

With trembling hands we reach out to those who suffer. May love and life flow out through us, to restore, to relieve and re-create.

**A Buddhist Prayer of Forgiveness**

"If I have harmed anyone in any way, either knowingly or unknowingly through my own confusions,

I ask their forgiveness.

If anyone has harmed me in any way, either knowingly or unknowingly through their own confusions, I forgive them.

And if there is a situation I am not yet ready to forgive, I forgive myself for that.

For all the ways that I harm myself, judge or be unkind to myself, through my own confusions, I forgive myself."

**Lords Prayer ~ 'The prayer Jesus taught his disciples'**

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

**Reading: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant**

Matthew 18:21-35 New International Version

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 times seven."

"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 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, cancelled 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 cancelled 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."

**Story: Margot's story**

When Margot was 16, her father was murdered in an armed robbery at the Hudson Bay store where he worked. Many years later Margot embarked on a path of reconciliation with her father's killer.

Margot says, 'The last time I saw my Dad he was in his coffin. I kissed him on his forehead and said, 'Dad, I promise that your life will not be for nothing.' At the time I didn't know what that meant.

Three days after he was shot, a journalist asked my mother, 'Do you ever think you'll be able to forgive the man who killed your husband?' Without hesitating my Mum said, 'Yes, I forgive him so that I can live.' She knew if she thought differently she wouldn't survive.

It wasn't so straight forward for Margot, however. The family was shattered, and she needed to be alone to think, and grieve, and she soon moved out. She felt like half a person, completely lost. Despite this, she achieved Honours degrees in English and Philosophy, married and had two daughters. Although the marriage failed, Margot's daughters gave her a reason to live.

She says "An author I knew said to me, 'You're not the only one who feels pain', but I was trapped in my hurt, any injustice filled me with vitriol ...

... poetry saved me. I ran courses using poetry as a form of healing to help people with their grief, published several books and received an award from the National Association of Poetry Therapy in America for my book, 'Dance With Your Healing: Tears Let Me Begin to Speak'. I'd felt like a loser all my life, this accolade made me feel worth something again.

Then a woman she didn't know, sent a donation to Margot's publisher. Margot sat there staring at the name, and said to her daughter, 'You won't believe this but I've just received a donation from the wife of Grandpa's killer.'

During 14 years in prison, the murderer, Glen, transformed his life. He attended an event to bring victims and perpetrators together, saw Margot's work, and wanted to contact her. Via his wife, Glen and Margot started exchanging emails. He asked Margot to forgive him. She said, "His words helped to heal me, but after a while the words weren't enough.. I knew I needed to look into his eyes. So three months later I met the man who killed my father. ... It was extremely powerful. We did lots of talking and lots of crying – it was as if we knew each other. This was the first of several meetings, which have informed my work on restorative justice which I now refer to as Sawbonna. Glen used it to sign off an email. He told me it was a Zulu word meaning "I see you" – our shared-humanity.

Margot says, "At first I had hated the very notion of forgiveness. To tell someone who is in pain to forgive is brutal. Forgiveness can't be prescriptive.

The moment I began to consider forgiveness, my whole body started to feel different, more complete and more at peace. *For me forgiveness is a fluid process which means healing.* Before I embarked on this path half of me was a void and full of nothingness, whereas now I have a friendship with the man who killed my father and that has helped put meaning back into my life." 567 w

**2<sup>nd</sup> Hymn: Green 101 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind'**

**Meditative Prayer by Toby McNeile offered by Ann Kader some time ago.**

**Meditative Prayer by Toby McNeile offered by Ann Kader some time ago.**

Let us build a walled garden for our spirits, fill it with warm sunshine, flowers and trees in blossom and bird singing.

Let it be a safe haven for small animals and for ourselves – a place to rest and contemplate.....

A place to build up our energies and restore our souls.

In our garden let there be special places with seats and fountains – places to pause and think about life.

Let one of these special places be dedicated to love and another to forgiveness.

The garden of love is to contemplate the love that is caritas, care and compassion and charity for all living things. Caritas for our loved ones and our friends. Caritas for the people whose lives we touch as we pass through each day....

Lives to appreciate and give thanks for.

Lives to understand. And in the garden of love that is caritas, let there be a place where we can see our own reflection.

At the entrance to the garden of forgiveness is a saying from the prayer that Jesus taught – "As we forgive them that trespass against us".

Let this garden be a garden of paths and spaces and places to write a promise. A corner to sit and ponder about forgiveness – why it is harder to forgive than to love; why the scars and blemishes of old hurts and misunderstandings still give pain?

Why anger burns slow and destructive and will not go out? How to deal with an insult or manage an injustice? How to review a comment or a moment and look for a truth and not a poisoned arrow?

From the garden of forgiveness let there be a gate into the garden of love and from the garden of love a way of return to the world.

**Silence, approx. 1 ½ Minutes**

**Reflective Music: Slow Minuet from 'Lady Radnor's Suite' (Parry) 2min 20s**

[RRHS Symphonic Orchestra • Suite in F Lady Radnor's Suite Slow Minuet • Parry - YouTube](#)

## ADDRESS – “Forgive and Forget?”

‘To Err is Human, to Forgive, Divine’ . This well-known and oft quoted phrase was written by Alexander Pope in his long poem ‘Essay on Criticism’ nearly 300 years ago. The ‘erring’ in his poem of over 700 lines is primarily concerned with how writers and literary critics behaved in Pope's age, as compared with the classical writers of ancient Greece and Rome.

‘Very interesting’, you may be thinking, ‘but how relevant is this to an address in a modern church service?’ The word ‘err’ itself is a little quaint, old-fashioned, maybe even - *genteel*. Have I erred in starting like this?

The word ‘Err’ means to make a mistake. It can be widened to include all the petty and all the serious wrongs and harms, intentional or otherwise that human beings inflict upon one another, upon other living beings, another’s property and upon our environment. Physical actions and sometimes words alone, may threaten another’s well-being, mental health, even their very life.

How to react to these misdeeds? As an imperfect human being myself, do I retaliate immediately, blaming the person who treated me, or a loved one, so unkindly? Or do I simmer inside, and harbour long lasting resentments? Or do I turn the proverbial other cheek, cease to blame the wrong-doer, cancel the debt? In other words, do I Forgive?

*Is it always possible to forgive?*

Does it depend on the degree of the harm done to me or a loved one?

Can we forgive on behalf of the person who was wronged or harmed?

How easy is it to forgive the unknown perpetrator of some wrong-doing?

Can forgiveness only work if the wrong-doer accepts it and tries to make amends?

It’s easy to forgive the child who unintentionally scrapes against you with her bike as she tries to squeeze past on a narrow path, especially when she says ‘Oh, sorry – I didn’t mean it’ It’s an accident with little consequence. It is not quite so easy to forgive the driver without insurance, who runs into the back of your car at the traffic lights, causing inconvenience and expense. Even that is relatively minor compared with the hit and run driver who leaves a loved one badly injured, or dead. How hard that would be to forgive!

Millions of words have been written about forgiveness down the ages, by people of all faiths and of none.

Starting with an example from the Christian standpoint, the New Testament story from Matthew, where Peter asked Jesus how many times should he forgive a

person who does him wrong (written as 'sinning against him') Should it be up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy- times seven. If you are good at mental arithmetic, you will have worked out that this is 490 times! But I don't think Jesus meant that we should not forgive on the 491<sup>st</sup> occasion. From the parable Jesus tells to illustrate his point, we see that forgiveness doesn't always come easily. Being able to forgive someone may take a lifetime, if at all, and it needs to come from the heart, as Jesus comments at the end of his story. Does that mean to forgive and forget?

Traditional Christians would pray for the person who wronged them, seeing themselves, as also needing forgiveness, as we heard in the parable. They would admit it is normal to feel anger towards wrong doing and injustice, but that it is not their place to judge the other person; they would ask God to make the judgement.

Forgiveness is hard work, but brings a sense of being freed from the anger, resentment and hurt that had imprisoned them. Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian woman who survived a Nazi concentration camp during the Holocaust, said, "Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free, and to realize the prisoner was you."

Let us remember that Jesus was raised as a Jew, and that Jewish Law requires the wrong doer to ask forgiveness from the person they have harmed, whether physically, financially, or emotionally. The victim is regarded as being cruel if they do not forgive, and its better to do so ungrudgingly – from the heart.

Moses Maimodes, C12th Jew from Spain wrote:

"Repentance and Yom Kippur only atone for sins between Man and G-d such as eating forbidden foods. The prayer before Yom Kippur extends complete forgiveness to everyone who has sinned against *you*, in whatever way during the year. There are two exceptions: For stealing money, which can be claimed in a court of law, and for someone who does wrong in anticipation of complete forgiveness. Another Jewish writer on the Laws of Yom Kippur, adds that one may withhold forgiveness if it is for the good of the person asking ... to teach them not to take it lightly.

I read that Muslims attach great importance to the concept of pardoning of sins by Allah (God), who desires people to show forgiveness to other human beings. The Prophet Muhammad taught his followers that the person who pardons his enemy, even while having the power to extract revenge, will be nearest to God in the Hereafter. Once someone asked the Prophet, "How many times are we to forgive our servants' faults?" He remained silent. The question was repeated. Again the Prophet gave no answer. But when the person asked a third time, he said, "Forgive your servant seventy times a day. He added, 'My heart is clouded until I have asked God's forgiveness seventy times during the day and night.'" Here we can see here a similarity to Biblical teachings.

For Buddhists, the *act* of forgiving is more important than *being* forgiven. Forgiving someone will not make him or her less guilty. They will still need to learn how to become better, since they are subjected to the laws of karma in which every bad

action generates another bad action re-directed to them. Those who can't forgive, attract a bad karma to themselves. Bad feelings and destructive emotions, like anger, revenge and resentments may be transformed into illness. So, the best attitude is to forgive unconditionally. The aggressors will face their karma anyway. Those who forgive do not attract any bad karma to themselves, and will enjoy life without resentments or anger.

Forgiveness is a lesson that has to be learned in many different incarnations, so someone will be reborn in adverse circumstances until they are emotionally unaffected, no matter how much others harm him.

The purpose of karma is not to punish people but to make them walk in the right path – the dharma. Karma is a law just like laws of chemistry and physics, not to punitish.

So, what *about* punishment? Every society wants reparation from its wrong-doers. These measures include losing certain privileges, or being kept securely apart from open society until deemed safe to rejoin it. Sometimes, this means life imprisonment, and that should be humane, otherwise the justice system itself becomes an official wrongdoer. Ideally, punishment and imprisonment provide opportunities to re-educate the wrongdoers, to enable them to play a useful role when they are released back into society. Restorative justice, where perpetrator and victim meet in carefully supervised conditions, has been tried with varying amounts of success. For some perpetrators, meeting face to face with the people they have hurt, hearing how their crimes affected them, will transform their lives afterwards. Some offenders reform completely and go on to live useful lives, working to prevent others from committing similar offenses.

'The Forgiveness Project' (TFP) was founded nearly 20 years ago, by Marina Cantacuzino, a journalist. She wanted to tell the real stories of people who don't want revenge for wrongs done to them but rather seek restoration and healing. TFP began with an exhibition launched in London in 2004. It was a series of images and personal stories exploring forgiveness from both sides. People from many countries, including England, Northern Ireland, South Africa, America contributed. The exhibition has been displayed in over 500 places worldwide. Some of us here today visited it at Marjons many years ago. It shows peoples' experiences of forgiveness as a healing process, a path out of victimhood and, ultimately, a journey of hope. Margot's story is one example of hundreds featured. As we heard, she found peace and healing when she was able to forgive Glen eventually.

Someone asked Marina Cantacuzino, founder of The forgiveness Project what forgiveness means to her? She replied that it's more than letting go; inevitably it grows out of being hurt or harmed... Letting go just means not engaging and is different in that sense. Forgiveness is more than just not hating. You need to put yourself in the shoes of the other. It's not just about forgiving the act but forgiving the fallibility of humanity. There's a wonderful quote by Alexander Solzhenitsyn about how the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being and so who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?



It is not always easy to forgive, and who are we to judge if someone can't forgive, or even if they can? Many people were offended when Gordon Wilson, whose daughter Marie died in the Enniskillen bombing in the 1980's, said he forgave the bombers.. Dr.Geraldine Smyth, a Belfast-born expert on conflict transformation, says forgiveness can play a part in delivering peace and reconciliation but it was not "the lynchpin".

"Forgiveness is a very loaded concept; it comes primarily I think from a religious background, and it suggests something more than human. It suggests something self-transcending. You cannot force it and you cannot manage it."

As people experience trauma differently, it may be impossible for some people to forgive, she notes, and she rejects the idea of a moral duty to show mercy. "It doesn't necessarily bring release in psychological or emotional terms but one thing is sure: Without forgiveness the world would be madder than it is. There needs to be some larger horizon than the natural instinct for revenge."

Smyth is a trained psychotherapist and a Dominican nun, an adjunct professor at Trinity College Dublin and a board member of 'Healing Through Remembering, Northern Ireland'.

She argues there is always a "relational context" to forgiveness, and this was evident in Wilson's reaction to Enniskillen. In the intimate, final moments with his daughter he spoke her name three times and she voiced her love for him, and "that powerful bond of relational love, and expression of unconditional love, maybe released some kind of self-transcending power in himself to be more than the perpetrators – to break out of the cage of instinctive revenge that might otherwise have encased him like the rubble did.

There was a mixed reaction when the Queen shook the hand of Martin McGuinness, former IRA member, on a visit to Ireland some years ago. Lord Mountbatten, her and Prince Philips uncle, and several family members, were killed by an IRA bomb over 40 years ago. But the handshake was significant for the Queen, and for McGuinness and also for bettering relations between Republic of Ireland and UK.

I think Sara Moores Campbell sums it up well. She writes this about Forgiveness', in 'Into The Wilderness'

"There is incredible power in forgiveness. Forgiveness .... may require a dimension of justice (penance, in traditional terms), but not always, for what it holds sacred is not fairness, but self-respect and community.

Forgiveness does not wipe away guilt, but invites reconciliation. And it is as important to be able to forgive as it is to be forgiven.

We can ... be open and receptive to the power of forgiveness, which, like any gift of the spirit, isn't of our own making. Its power is rooted in love. The Greek word for

this kind of love is agape. Martin Luther King, Jr., defined agape as "Love seeking to preserve and create community."

This kind of love is human, but .. also the grace of a transcendent power that lifts us out of ourselves. It transforms and heals; even when we are separated by time or space or death, it reconciles us to ourselves and to Life. ...its power abides not just between us but within us. If we invited the power of agape to heal our personal wounds and give us the gift of forgiveness, we would give our world a better chance of survival. "

So, its complicated, more complicated than the simple phrase, "to err is human, to forgive divine" but maybe that's good as an end point, or really, a starting point. Its about healing oneself as well as the other person, and some might say that's when the 'divine' in all of us surfaces. *AMEN*

### **Final Hymn: Green 188 'Let Love Continue Long'**

#### **Closing Words: from Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea Maritima about 314 AD**

May I be no one's enemy and may I be the friend of that which is eternal and abides.

May I never rejoice in the ill fortune of one who has wronged me.

May I, to the extent of my power, give needful help to all who are in want

May I never fail a friend. May I always keep tame that which rages within me.

May I accustom myself to be gentle and never be angry with others because of circumstances. May I know good people and follow in their footsteps.

#### **Closing Music: Regular Piano Piece**

#### **Extinguish Chalice**

#### **Closing Music/Video: 'You are forgiven' by Deb Talan 4mins 9secs**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArVVvKDz7ds>

#### **Notices: Offertory: on way out to Coffee: Chatrooms for Zoomers**