



Alstonville  
Anglicans

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

**Welcome**



### **Sharing the Good Life**

We acknowledge the Bundjalung people, traditional custodians of the Land.

Our doors are open: LGBTQIA+ welcome here.

Streaming licence: CCLI 102220

Alstonville Anglicans are committed to ensuring that all people who participate in our worship, programs and ministries have a safe and rewarding experience.

**Tel: 66280231 [www.anglicans.live](http://www.anglicans.live)**

**Bank account: BSB 705 077 / Acc:00032931**

## 24<sup>th</sup> September – 1<sup>st</sup> October

24 <sup>th</sup> September	9am	<b>Sunday</b> Holy Communion <b>No Messy Church</b>
25 <sup>th</sup> September	9am-12pm 9am-3pm 10am 10am	<b>Monday</b> Parish Office Op Shop Anam Cara Deadline for bulletin items
26 <sup>th</sup> September	9am-12pm	<b>Tuesday</b> Parish Office <b>Closed</b>
27 <sup>th</sup> September	9am-12pm 9am 9am-3pm	<b>Wednesday</b> Parish Office Open Anam Cara Op Shop
28 <sup>th</sup> September	9am-12pm 9am-3pm 9.30am 6pm	<b>Thursday</b> Parish Office Open Op Shop Play Place Anam Cara
29 <sup>th</sup> September	9am-12pm 10am	<b>Friday</b> Parish Office Open Holy Communion
30 <sup>th</sup> September		<b>Saturday</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> October	9am	<b>Sunday</b> Holy Communion

**This bulletin contains current announcements and the week's calendar and the sermon notes from the previous Sunday. Use our welcome booklet for info and contact details for regular activities. Keep it as a reference tool. We welcome any feedback on the booklet.** [.../.../welcomeBooklet\\_v3.pdf](http://www.welcomeBooklet_v3.pdf)

## Season of Creation

**The theme for 2023 is Let Justice and Peace Flow and the symbol is A Mighty River.**

### **A mighty torrent can move mountains**



Our individual actions during the Season of Creation are important. Celebrating Creation, taking part in clean-ups, planting trees, and reducing our carbon footprint are some of the immediate actions we can take. We must also recognise that as we need a mighty movement of justice, individual actions are no longer enough. Justice also includes paying historic debts. At a global level, nations with power and wealth have a duty to deal justly and honestly with communities that suffer most from the climate and ecological crises. They have not dealt righteously with their less wealthy neighbours in global forums. They have not fulfilled their promises of financing the losses and damages that vulnerable communities are suffering from, or funding necessary biodiversity initiatives in less wealthy nations, nor have they made the necessary sacrifices to stay below 1.5 degrees Celsius global warming. Nevertheless, Global South nations, working together for more than 30 years, have just managed to win a victory at COP27 in making wealthier nations realize their moral duty to provide financing for loss and damage. The recent decisions at COP15 to preserve biodiversity are also hopeful and required similar perseverance. These victories have been achieved by those with less power working together. Together we can be a mighty river of justice and peace, that brings new life to earth and future generations, a river that can move the mountains of injustice.

# HORIZONS

SUNDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER, 3PM



## ANNA RABINOWICZ & JEREMY STAFFORD

*in Concert*

The combination of classical Guitar and Flute offers a special blend of sounds and colours in a wide spectrum of imagination and range of expressions.

ST MARY'S BALLINA  
38-42 Norton St

Tickets \$20,  
\$15 Concession.

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[info@themusicestuary.org](mailto:info@themusicestuary.org)

## **Regerer8**

Grafton Cathedral Parish Centre 21-22 October 2023

Registration forms are available at the office. For more information contact Maria Gandey: 0407 172 062.

### **To Make you Smile**



### **Sermon Notes Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September Desiree Snyman**

#### **Reflection on Matthew 18**

#### ***Forgiveness***



The movies *The Railway Man* and *Philomena* were both released in 2013. *The Railway Man* tells the tragic story of a traumatised war veteran whose mind is broken by the torture he suffered as a POW where he was forced to work on the Thai-Burma Railway north of the Malay Peninsula. Returning to the Far East

decades later, *The Railway Man* meets with his tormentor. At first he attempts to torture his persecutor using the same methods that were used against him. His former persecutor

accepts the reverse torture out of a sense of guilt. *The Railway Man* breaks down. In breaking down he breaks through his pain and miraculously forgives his torturer. Startlingly victim and abuser become firm friends and together become an emblem for peace.

The delightful *Philomena* is based on a true story. Philomena, whose child was taken from her by the Catholic Church makes brave attempts to track him down – later with the help of a journalist. Philomena discovers that her son was taken to America and when she travels there she finds out that not only has he died but that he had been looking for her and was buried in the grounds of the convent where he was born. The infuriating issue is that the nuns had refused to give either Philomena or her son information about each other. At the climax of the film the journalist is filled with righteous rage and storms into the convent and challenges the nun about her lies and her deceit and the pain that she had unnecessarily caused. I identify with the journalist's anger. Some anger, the burning white kind, can be a spiritual director, a gift of the Spirit, a bolt of power that energises you to challenge injustice. Like the journalist I was somewhat thwarted when Philomena looked down on the crippled nun, the one who had abused her and taken so much from her and said the words "I forgive you." I felt my anger turning on Philomena – how dare she forgive so easily, so quickly! Philomena's forgiveness is not piety, nor is it religious sentimentalism and it is not submissive obedience to some external moral law. Philomena's forgiveness is a powerful moment of her agency, where she takes power back. She takes the initiative, she makes the decision about who she wants to be and how she wants to live her life – she will not be defined by her past, by the nun, by the journalist – she, Philomena, will decide how she will live her life. The moment is subversive and unexpected and strangely liberating.

## ***Forgiveness?***



At first glance the parable in Matthew 18 is about forgiveness. Matthew 6 encourages us to pray asking God to forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Matthew 18 is a picture story about Matthew 6.12-14 illustrating the need to forgive others . Previously

Jesus offered a simple three step checklist on forgiveness: – ask the sinner directly, take a few others with you, take the whole assembly with you. If there is no request for forgiveness treat him as “Gentile and tax collector,” in other words, treat him as a lost sheep ([Matt. 18:15-20](#)). Jesus is intentionally ironic in this teaching because the pharisees accused Jesus of befriending Gentiles and tax collectors ([Matt. 9:11](#)). In the parable of the lost sheep the shepherd must forgive the sheep to reconcile it back into the flock. Just as God forgives the lost sheep we must forgive others – without condition, without repentance, and without a promise of reform. As in the Parable of the Weeds, forgiveness, permission, and remission are the same word.

The parable ends with a stark warning on the unending torture that awaits those who are unable to allow the grace of forgiveness to flow through them. As Robert Capon writes: “In heaven there are only forgiven sinners. . . . In hell there are only forgiven sinners. . . . The sole difference, therefore, between hell and heaven is that in heaven the forgiveness is accepted and passed along while in hell it is rejected and blocked” (p220 in *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus* 2002).

We are aware that when we suffer because of another's actions the act of forgiveness is excruciatingly hard, which is why when forgiveness flows through us it is pure grace, a miracle. The miraculous nature of forgiveness is on beautiful display in the true life dramas of *Philomena* and *The Railway Man*. We are also aware that not forgiving those who sin against us binds us to past hurts and becomes a double wound. Binding the sin to the sinner not only binds the sinner but binds us as well; and loosening or forgiving the sin of the sinner not only loosens the sinner but loosens us as well.

### **But**

A teaching on forgiveness is a reasonable interpretation of this parable and one that I have been taught. While the teaching on forgiveness of sin is consistent in scholarship and commentary there is something in me, a soul voice, that doesn't quite allow me to wholeheartedly swallow this conventional interpretation; here are some of my difficulties:

1.

I am anxious about the church as an institution speaking about forgiveness without referencing the power dynamics at play: those with power have the option to offer or withhold forgiveness and those without power can only beg to receive it. I agree with the concept of forgiveness, of course, however I have some hesitations when there is no depth analysis of trauma and its detrimental effects on the brain, the body, and the psyche.

2.

I feel anxiety because any current interpretations on forgiveness are in the context of institutional abuse. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse revealed how "forgiveness" was used by the church to pardon



paedophile priests who were forgiven for their sin of child abuse only to be moved to a different school or parish to begin the sin again.

3.

I do not agree that the king represents God. Some logical elements simply don't add up. While Peter and the church are asked to forgive 70 x 7 the king is unable to forgive his servant a second time. We are to forgive unconditionally but God forgives conditionally? Really? The king in this parable and other Matthean parables is a vindictive tyrant associated more with the death dealing oppressive reign of Rome that Jesus stood against. The king in this parable collects excessive tribute and inflicts vicious torture when his compassion runs out after only a few verses. If the tyrant king offers mercy at all it is purely self-serving and functions to reinforce oppression. The forgiveness of debt the high status slave receives serves to bind him to the king.

### ***Concluding comments***

I feel nervous around parables in the same way that I am nervous around trick questions. I've learnt the hard way that a simple allegorical view of parables will not be enough, and that the parable invites me to analyse systems of power, it invites me to think really hard about life. Parables are not stories or fables that convey a simple moral point. They are meant to provoke critical reflection, to pull the logs out of our own eyes. While sometimes based on real life events parables are not meant to be interpreted as literal.



Some of the background information to the parable is helpful. The first slave is more of a chief financial officer slave or minister of finance rather than a dish washing slave. The amount owed is billions and is likely to be a tribute or a tax that he is expected to extract from a subjugated people. This high status slave was part of the system that allowed few to have too much and too many to have too little. With this in mind the invitation to forgive 70X7 or 77 times depending on your translation takes on a different meaning. More than a symbol for "a lot," 70x7 is a reference to jubilee politics and sabbath economics. Every seventh year was a year of rest where lands were to lie fallow (Leviticus 25). Every 7x7 year, every fiftieth year, all debts were cancelled, and lands returned to their original owners, and slaves were freed (Lev. 25:10). The intention is the same as the law of gleaning (Lev. 19:9-10), to ensure that everyone had access to the means of production, whether the family farm or simply the fruits of their own labour. In other words 7x70 evokes the cancellation of debt and the collapse of unjust systems.

The parable of the tyrant king is a depiction of the systems of power in first century Judea under harsh Roman rule and the multileveled tax systems creating poverty and hardship. The problems are structural sin. There are systemic issues. The system brutalises people into power and submission. Torture is required to maintain power over others. Even high status slaves are vulnerable.

One challenge that the parable offers me is this: do I maintain unjust structures especially those that are unmerciful to the environment and the vulnerable? Or can I take every opportunity to live out the sabbath economics and jubilee politics of Jesus? The slave had an opportunity to invest in a system of oppression or to offer grace, taking on the status of



a child and giving up privilege. Can I take every opportunity to divest myself of privilege, to take on the status of a child, to forgive endlessly? Can I break with power over structures and take every opportunity to introduce grace as a counterforce into a brutal system of oppression? In small and big

decisions, do I support an unjust structure for short term gain, or can I choose mercy which is counterculture and subversive? For example, is a simple “yes” to including a Voice to parliament an opportunity to introduce grace into a system of historical oppression? If I can offer a small amount of mercy, that grace can serve as a crack in the structure, a mustard seed that grows into an invasive plant and takes over other cracks, and joins with other invasive plants, until the structure crumbles and only love and mercy are left.

Desiree Snyman

### Sentence of the Day

By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2.8–9

### Collect

Loving and righteous God,  
your boundless generosity exceeds  
all that we can desire or deserve,  
and you give to the last worker all you promised to the first:  
liberate us from all jealousy and greed,  
that we may be free to love and serve others,  
and in your service may find our true reward;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Matthew 20:1-16

<sup>1</sup> 'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; <sup>4</sup> and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. <sup>5</sup> When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" <sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." <sup>8</sup> When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." <sup>9</sup> When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. <sup>10</sup> Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup> And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup> saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'