



# Sunday Reflection

## 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 13 September 2020

# Pentecost 15

On this 15th Sunday after Pentecost, and the fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, we gather physically and virtually to worship God our Father, whose forgiveness and mercy are as limitless as his love.

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'" Matthew 18.22**

### An Illustration to set the scene

One evening in September 2018 a young accountant was watching TV when an off-duty police officer entered his flat and shot him dead. She had mistaken his flat for hers on the floor



below and thought he was a burglar.

Botham Jean was one of seventeen unarmed black men shot by US police in 2018 and his death sparked protests from residents angry about racism and a lack of accountability within the police. Amber Guyger was originally charged with manslaughter but eventually convicted of murder. Many people felt that her ten-year prison sentence was too lenient and it was

clear that issues surrounding police attitudes to black men and firearms use still needed to be addressed. It is easy to understand why Jean's family and friends would feel resentment and anger towards the police.

A few minutes after the sentence was handed out, Botham Jean's brother Brandt told Amber Guyger that he forgave her. In a moving speech he said, *"I love you just like anyone else... I want the best for you, because I know that's exactly what Botham would want, and the best would be, give your life to Christ."*

Then, with the judge's permission, he walked nervously across the room to hug her.

### **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

In today's reading from Matthew's Gospel Peter asks if he should forgive someone who has wronged him as many as seven times. And Jesus says, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times." In the Bible, seven is symbolic of completeness or totality, and seventy-seven represents complete and utter totality. If someone wrongs us, we must always completely forgive them.

To emphasise this, Jesus tells a story in which a king orders a slave and his family to be sold for non-payment of an almost impossibly enormous debt. When the slave begs for more time to pay, the king takes pity on him and forgives him the entire debt. But the slave does not do the same when he is owed the equivalent of a couple of months' wages. He uses violence and throws his debtor into prison. When the king is told what has happened, he is angry and punishes the unmerciful slave, just as he punished the one who owed him money.

The message is the same as that in Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer, which has the line "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors". After teaching the prayer Jesus elaborates on it, saying, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

It underlines that forgiveness is, or should be, a never-ending circle. We forgive others because God forgives us and, because we forgive others, God forgives us. Harsh and difficult as it may sound, there is no excuse for failing to forgive.

### **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

A failure to forgive can result in festering resentment; a deep abiding anger that can lead to physical symptoms related to stress, anxiety and depression. If resentment turns to hatred or violence, it can have a devastating impact on individuals and communities, potentially lasting for generations. Failure to forgive can indeed be a form of self-torture that is ultimately more damaging for those who harbour grudges than for those with whom they are angry.

On the other hand, research has shown that learning to forgive improves mental and physical health, makes people more hopeful for their future and leads them to grow in kindness, respect, generosity and love towards others.

It would probably have been easier for Brandt Jean to hold on to his anger with Amber Guyger for killing his brother. Instead, he recognised her as a child of God in need of healing and forgiveness. She left the courtroom clutching the judge's gift to

her of a Bible and with advice from the judge to start with John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

May she learn to forgive herself and grow in kindness, respect, generosity and love. And may we do the same. In Jesus' name.

**"Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'" Matthew 18.22**

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**