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Dear Friends,

***“If another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive?”***

As a small child my mother just about convinced me that she had eyes at the back of her head. Now and again when our boys were small they came to believe that, like hay fever and other foibles best not mentioned here, I had inherited this strange trait from mother. Not long ago the youngest of our girls tried to fathom out if I really do have two sets of eyes when I worked out her misdemeanours! For centuries Christians have believed that God knows us, sees us, cares about us and forgives us. Together with Jesus we refer to God as ‘Our Father’ and some of us try, but often fail, to model our lives after this perfect parent. Generations of churchgoers have called their priest ‘Father’ and now and again a female priest has been tempted to ask the people to call her ‘Mother’ ...but honestly, until I’m all seeing, all loving and all forgiving, I shall refrain from doing that!



In last week’s gospel, Jesus suggested how the early Christian church might set about resolving conflict - the three readings today continue that theme. Last week we learned that we should name the problem, try to resolve it and, when this proves impossible, we should treat those who have offended us like tax collectors and gentiles. A child in our midst at St John’s when asked what that means reminded us that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners so we must be forgiving too. Our readings this Sunday repeat that message. Our youngest child does Kumon Maths each day. For 10 minutes or so she practises her addition, subtraction, division and multiplication. The work gets a little harder each day but over and again the same questions return in different guises and each time her reaction/answer should be faster. How many sevens in forty-nine? Reduce the fraction seven over forty-nine? Seven times seven? Seventy-seven times seven? Sometimes the numbers get so large we cannot imagine when we would need to use them in real life, especially when we struggle with multiplication or long division. Kumon students practise every day of the year, except on their birthdays. Jesus, when trying to describe the perfect Christian community, tells a story about an unforgiving slave who despite being forgiven by his master cannot bring himself to forgive his fellow-slave. When Peter asks how often he should forgive his fellow Christian he suggests seven for an answer. Jesus replies, not seven times but seventy times seven - in other words the number is huge so don’t try to keep a score.

In the weeks and months ahead I hope you will forgive me if it feels that I am not as present in the parish as I have been whilst I try and rise to the challenge of being both Vicar in Radyr and Vicar of St Fagans and Michaelston-super-Ely. We might kid our children that we can either see or know what they are up to but the unavoidable truth is that none of us can be in two places at once. On a “normal” Sunday, Radyr has three services at 8am, 11am and 6pm at Christ Church and one at 9.15pm at St John’s in Danescourt. St Mary’s Church in St Fagans normally has just one service at 10.30am and once a month another at 8am. So you see the problem. I am delighted that The Reverend Gareth Rayner-Williams will be licensed as an Associate Priest in the North West Ministry Area but will primarily serve with me in Radyr and St Fagans - this means he will normally be leading worship in one of our churches each week. Some of you will meet him next Sunday - I will be conducting services in both Radyr and on Zoom for St Fagans, whose building project is still work in progress. During the week Gareth teaches at St Teilo’s school. Belinda, as curate of Radyr, will usually be at the Radyr services and together we will respond to the pastoral needs of the parishes and conduct our weekday services. This new pattern will take some adjustment for us all but I believe will be for the mutual flourishing of all of us and for our ministry area team. I will be

serving as a school governor both in Bryn Deri and in St Fagans so I shall need to be very careful with diary management and to preserve time for myself and my family. Please forgive me if I am not leading worship or available just when you hoped to see or speak to me - it doesn't mean I don't care. I do, so if you are in need or want to contact me at any time, please do not hesitate to email or call me.

When Paul writes to the early church in Rome as the first Christians were trying to work out whether one day was more holy than another or whether they should still keep kosher, Paul encourages them not to judge other's dietary arrangements but to recognise the need to live their lives "to the Lord" rather than judging others on how they live or what they eat. So he says, "welcome those who are weak in faith but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions".



Yesterday, the government announced a raft of new measures. We await further guidance on how these and future announcements will affect the gradual reopening of our hall and our Sunday services - I may be wrong but I suspect it won't be too long before we are required to wear masks as in the Church of England. But, for now, the good news is that we will be welcoming back our Sunday Club children to both our churches tomorrow.

Once upon a time people suspected children were the "weak in faith" and denied them bread and wine, believing that they needed to understand before they could receive. Nowadays we recognise that all baptised believers welcomed into God's family should be welcome at the altar. After all, who of us really understands what we are doing when we receive the sacrament? Would you deny an adult with dementia the sacrament? I, for one, am looking forward to seeing the delight on the children's faces as, for the first time in many months, I place the sacrament, Christ's broken body, in their hands. For many years I have had a sense that I walk on holy ground when they come to receive, for so often they will gaze at the little white wafer in their palm just as they gaze in wonder at the world around us.

A central theme in Paul's letter to the quarrelsome church in Rome is that we are saved by God's generous grace and mercy, not by following rules. Paul reminds the Christian community what God has done for them in Christ by reconciling them to the Father and to each other on the cross. Paul is therefore less interested in what people eat than in what they need to build them up in faith. Perhaps this week you will take a moment to lift your hearts in thanksgiving for all our children's leaders who, despite the lockdown, have tried to nurture our children in faith on Zoom and who will now continue to lead and nurture their faith and emergent beliefs as they meet in our halls and churches? Pray too for those who lead the 6 adults and 25 youngsters from across the North West Ministry Area who are preparing for confirmation on Zoom. And, finally, do take a moment this week to look at Sunday's readings (Genesis 50:15-21, Romans 14:1-12 and Matthew 18: 21-35). Perhaps as you read you will hear God's words anew - maybe encouraging you to forgive as you are forgiven, to give thanks for all who nurtured you in faith and to leave judgement to God.

May God bless you and forgive you in the week to come,

**Vicki**  
**X**