

**The 18th Sunday after Trinity  
Sunday 11th October 2020  
marks the beginning of Prisons Week**

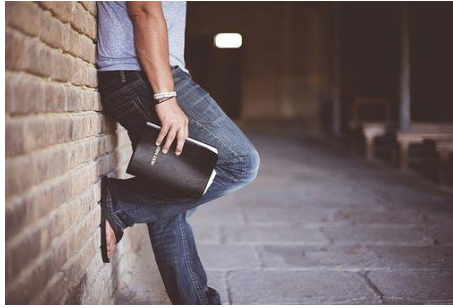


***The Collect for 18th Sunday after Trinity***

God, our judge and saviour,  
teach us to be open to your truth  
and to trust in your love,  
that we may live each day  
with confidence in the salvation which is given  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Gospel reading: Matthew 25: 31-46***

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” <sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” <sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’



### ***A word about 'Prisons Week' from Revd Helen:***

Statistics seem to be a part of daily life in these days of coronavirus. News bulletins providing us with daily figures for infection rates, hospital admissions and not least, deaths. Behind every figure is an individual, a life precious to God, a person created by God and made in the image of God. No wonder the psalmist could write, *'I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made'* (Psalm 139:14). Allow me then to bombard with some more statistics:

As at October 2020 the prison population of England and Wales stands at 81,536.  
As at October 2020 there are 95,228 children who have a parent in prison.

Today marks the beginning of *Prisons Week*. The theme this year is *'You are Not Alone'*. Christians are encouraged to pray for prisoners and their families, for victims of crime, prison staff and prison chaplains, and all those working in the criminal justice system so that they will know that they are accompanied in thought and prayer and are 'not alone'. *Prisons Week* began in England and Wales in 1975 under the label 'Prisoners' Week'. Its aim then was to encourage churches and the wider Christian community to pray for the needs of prisoners. Its committee was made up of Prison Chaplains and other Christians involved in work with prisoners and their families. It quickly gained support from many different Christian denominations and later became a registered charity. In 1995 it broadened its work to look not only to the needs of prisoners but importantly to look to *all* those involved in and affected by prison – prisoners' families, all those impacted by crime, prison staff and other people working in this area of criminal justice, as well as the many volunteers who are so crucial to outreach and ministry in our prisons.

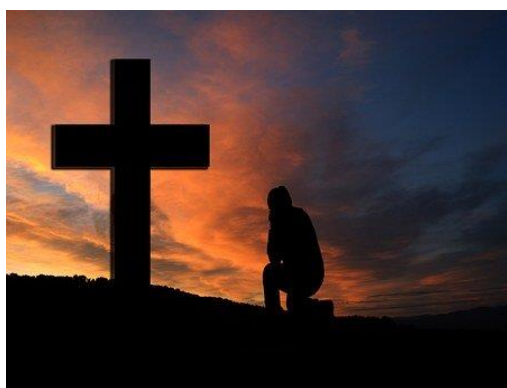
Throughout the Gospels Jesus challenges us to follow his grace and acceptance of 'sinners'. So often Jesus was criticised by the religious leaders for associating with, and – shock horror – sharing meals with people who were regarded as the last and the least of society. Men, women and young people in prison today are often regarded as being in this category of society. It is perhaps all too easy to look at a prisoner and see only his or her offending behaviour, and yet that person is someone's son or daughter, mother or father, grandparent, sister or brother, 'fearfully and wonderfully made'. Jesus tells us clearly in this gospel reading that faithfulness to him is shown in what we do for the last and the least. Jesus' words on a coming judgment warn us too that our response to human need has eternal consequences.

When we consider in this passage what Jesus expects of us in caring for those less fortunate than ourselves, they are in fact quite simple things which many are capable of doing – offering a meal or a drink, welcoming a stranger, cheering up someone who is sick or lonely. Admittedly however, prison visiting is not for everyone, but individuals can show the love of Christ in supporting the work of prisons in other ways. For example, the charity *Prison Fellowship* organises ‘Letter Link’ which enables a prisoner to have letter contact with a ‘pen pal’ volunteer. For some prisoners this is the only contact they have with anyone on the outside and provides much needed care and hope. ‘Angel tree’ is another initiative through which volunteers raise funds to enable prisoners to send a Christmas gift to their children, helping to keep the parent-child bond alive. This will be particularly important this year when family prison visits have been limited by the pandemic.

But even if we cannot physically come alongside prisoners, their families, and those impacted by crime, we can come alongside them through PRAYER. In its early years *Prison Fellowship* was excluded from actually going into prisons, but during that time its members earnestly PRAYED. The ‘PF’ doesn’t just stand for Prison Fellowship - it stands too for Prayer First! And this week each of us can be part of the *Prisons Week* prayer initiative so that those for whom we pray can be assured that they are not alone. In addition to the *Prisons Week* prayer set out below, there is a prayer topic for each day of the week which will focus on a particular group affected by prison or criminal justice.

And a final thought - *Prison Fellowship* has as its mission statement: “*we believe that no one is beyond hope. Do you?*” Helping someone to believe they can change, helps them to bring that change about. One of the key note speakers at the National Prison (virtual) Conference last week had this word of advice, “*You may be confined by prison. Do not be defined by prison*”.

I dare to believe that no one is beyond hope. Do you?



You may like to follow this pattern of daily prayer during Prisons Week:

***SUNDAY: THE PRISONS WEEK PRAYER***

Lord, you offer freedom to all people.

We pray for those in prison.

Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist.

Support with your love prisoners and their families and friends,  
prison staff and all who care.

Heal those who have been wounded by the activities  
of others, especially the victims of crime.

Help us to forgive one another.

To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly together with Christ  
in His strength and in His Spirit, now and every day. Amen.

***MONDAY: PRAYING with PRISONERS*** – that by the Spirit of grace and truth,  
hearts will be changed, bringing them to know the unconditional love and mercy of  
God for all his children.

***TUESDAY: PRAYING with VICTIMS OF CRIME*** – that those whose lives are  
darkened by crimes committed against them will find the light of healing where trust  
and hope can be gently restored.

***WEDNESDAY: PRAYING with FAMILIES*** – whose lives are changed by  
crime and imprisonment, that daily needs are met and that relationships are  
preserved.

***THURSDAY: PRAYING with COMMUNITIES*** – to be able to see each other as people  
created in God's image, and serve Christ faithfully in reaching out to the last and the  
least.

***FRIDAY: PRAYING with THOSE WORKING IN PRISON*** – for daily strength to  
serve with courage. For protection. For compassionate hearts.

***SATURDAY: PRAYING with THOSE WORKING IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
SYSTEM*** – that they will act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with Christ in his  
strength and in his Spirit.



***With greetings to you all from  
The Rector and Revd Helen***

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