

**Lectionary readings: Ezekiel 33: 7-11; Psalm 119: 33-40;
Romans 13: 8-14; Matthew 18: 15-20**

For reflection and prayer

- **Ezekiel 33:** God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He wants us all to change our ways and turn our life around. This is possible for each one of us. And it's helpful for us to reflect on our lives, and our ways of behaving towards others, and our responses to situations and circumstances. This is where daily reflection at the end of each day is so valuable to see whether our lives are in line with how God wants us to live, and where and how we need to change. This requires courage and humility. Let's try it this week.
- **Psalm 119:** The verse that leapt out at me from 'Psalms for Praying' was v35: '*O that I might learn to bless others selflessly, to be a silent benediction.*' How wonderful it would be if each one of us this week blessed others, finding good in them, valuing them for who they are, seeing God's beauty in them, and being a silent benediction, rather than criticising and finding fault. Quite a challenge!
- **Romans 13:** 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' says Paul. Love your neighbour as if he/she were yourself, for we are all inter-connected. The Gospel can be summed up in one word - Love. Paul warns us not to get so caught up in our day-to-day obligations that we are oblivious to God's presence. We need to be alert to His presence, alert to what He is doing in us and around us. Paul urges us to clothe ourselves in Christ. It might be good for each of us to reflect this week on what it

means to clothe ourselves in Christ. This will help us to see where we fall short of Christ's example and where we need God's grace to help us become more like Jesus.

- **Matthew 18:** What emerges for me in this passage is the need for humility and love on the part of the person who has been hurt and the person who has done the hurting. So often, when there is conflict, pride and the desire to justify oneself, this prevents reconciliation from taking place. Wherever there are people together, there will be conflict. And the Christian church is no exception. But it is how we handle conflict that will mark us out as different from the world. Love, gentleness, the willingness to forgive, remembering the presence of Jesus in our midst, deep humility, the willingness to admit that we ourselves are not perfect, that we are all in need of God's grace, that we are all in a state of becoming, and that God hasn't finished with us. How do we shape up here? How well does our church handle conflict? How willing are we to forgive when we have been wronged? How willing are we to admit when we have hurt or offended others? How willing are we to take the initiative in working towards reconciliation?

A prayer

Spirit of integrity and peace, stir us with Your presence today; strengthen us in our desire to forgive one another; sharpen us in our understanding of different points of view; support us in our exploring of fresh approaches; struggle with us as we labour towards reconciliation; shine upon us as we bring to birth new visions; stay with us as we bring to birth new visions; stay with us as we translate hopes into highways. Amen
(Donald Hilton)