

**Definition of Community:** All the people living in a specific locality including its inhabitants. The definition that would appeal to us as Christians is 'A Body of people having a religion in common'

**Introduction:** *Thoughts from Liturgical Material:* In ancient cultures success wasn't determined by what you have but rather by the community's opinion of you, which was based on the family from which you came. Negative views would be labelled 'shame' because of being poor & accompanied by the commitment of shameful acts. Today's readings - true honour doesn't derive from the family in which you are born, but rather how we treat each other.

**Contents: Rom 14: 7-9** 'For none of us lives for ourselves & none of us dies to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord; & if we die, we die to the Lord. So then whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died & returned to life so that He might be the Lord of both the dead & the living'. These verses depict unselfishness, isolation & our dependence on God. **Matthew's parable:** The king's 'servant' had a responsible position & incurred a massive debt (impossible of payment) to the king. The king displayed unbelievable generosity in his cancellation of debt. The king is moved to pity by the hopeless plea of servant who had proved himself incompetent & perhaps criminally careless in the king's service. Here stands no human master; here is the loving Father. God & the sinner are face to face & the sinner finds no accusation, but forgiveness – divine; forgiveness which passes all understanding. (Which he knows he doesn't deserve)

And it's in the context of this limitless mercy that the subsequent action of servant is so utterly deplorable. Going from his king's presence, a free man, relieved of an impossible debt, the servant met a debtor who owed him a small amount. The same plea as before is heard: "Have patience with me & I'll pay you" – the same plea with a world of difference. The 1st time we heard it, it was a desperate plea, incapable of fulfilment. But now it's reasonable as this amount can be paid off. And yet this time it meets with cold indifference. There's no mercy in the heart of 1 who had been shown such mercy. It's a shocking state of affairs which the generous king can't tolerate.

**Application: Matt 6:12, 14-15** records: 'Forgive us our debtors, as we forgive our debtors. For if you forgive people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.' For 1 who has received God's grace of forgiveness should also display forgiveness. The motive for showing mercy isn't contained in an abstract or distant God, but in the God who is present in the person of Jesus. Jesus entire life demonstrates the teaching of mercy which He displayed throughout His ministry. This parable is 1 of divine compassion & 1 of divine salvation. Human forgiveness is neither the cause nor the condition nor the measure of God's forgiveness of people: "I forgave you all that debt & should not you have mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?" (v 33f)

In no community - no 2 people think or act alike, if it so happen it's a mere coincidence - meaning very few times that there may be agreement, but more likely - much disagreement. As a whole because we are diverse groups, we'll also have diverse views. But nothing prevents us as a community to be loving, caring, generous, supportive, helpful or even display concern. There would be challenging times where someone gets ill & needs to get to the hospital or when death occurs. Interest isn't sufficient - a helping hand would be most welcomed; to be a very presence in need –would be most welcoming.

**Luke 10:25-37**-gives us an insight even if we are not 'so-called neighbours' or living in close proximity of each other - how to conduct ourselves or being neighbourly. **Key vs33-35** records to what extremes we should go to help. **Rom 12:13** records 'Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality – which doesn't mean to stand ready & to offer tea & a biscuit, but rather a willing ear to listen & broad shoulders to lean on when aggrieved & want to shed a tear.'

**In Conclusion:** Great & dedicated friendship is formed, appreciated & demonstrated as recorded in **Job 2: 11-13**. The ideal picture of community is painted in **Acts 4: 32-37** - 'The Believers share their Possessions' **Vs 34a** "There were no needy persons among them" everyone's needs were met. I'm convinced to believe that we are talking about both material & spiritual needs. This is how a Christian Community ought to live together. Let's practice this @ St Thomas – Rondebosch, if it for now - this is not the case.