

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: 6<sup>th</sup> September 09**

### **On forgiveness**

This weekend would be my son's birthday. But he was run over and died 19 years ago. Forgiveness is on my mind. And I heard a snippet of a radio comment on Tuesday that mentioned ideas around forgiveness. What I am aware of is how easily we say, "I forgive you." Or "you're forgiven" – and sometimes, "please forgive me." I once heard Derrida, the French philosopher, speak on the concept of forgiveness, and he said "only the unforgiveable is worth forgiveness." Those words have stayed with me and sit alongside my understanding of a Jewish teaching that says forgiveness is God's business not ours: we do not have the power to forgive what needs forgiving. It seems to me that we need to reinvest forgiveness once again with the magnitude and seriousness of something that is God's business; that is outside our human responsibility. Then we can take ourselves out of the place of power over others - to forgive or refuse to forgive. We can turn attention to ourselves, and consider how we can let go the anger, resentment, need for vengeance, despair or disappointment that the act requiring forgiveness generates in us.

When we let those feelings go, and stop feeding them, we can learn to accept and live with the pain and loss and the disappointment without the bitterness that can destabilize our peace of mind and heart: what is done is done. We do not have to bear the responsibility of forgiving; only acknowledging and accepting our feelings. If we can come to this place, it seems to me we can regain peace within ourselves and look with compassion on the other, acknowledging that we too have "done those things that we ought not to have done and left undone those things that we ought to have done", and we too need to know we are forgiven. An acknowledgement we have caused pain to another, and an apology - saying sorry – is the place to start, then resolving to make good as best we can and start all over again. Only the unforgiveable is worthy of forgiveness – and that is God's business and not our burden. We need to live at peace with ourselves and with compassion toward others.

**Susan**