

2017-09-10 Sue Diggory
Trinity 13

Romans 13: 8 – end and Matthew 18: 15 – 20

The need for reconciliation is a huge issue today, both on a personal, a national and an international scale, and of course reconciliation is at the heart of the Christian faith, the bringing together of God the creator, and us his creation, his people through the work of Christ on the Cross, through both his death and resurrection, the saving process by which we are once more able, despite our lack of perfection, 'our sinful nature,' to be in relationship with our perfect all-loving God, the one who created us, the one who longs for each one of us to be reconciled to him.

We only have to look around our world to see many examples of what can happen when humanity fails to be reconciled within itself, let alone with God. On a global scale, there are acts of terrorism; the list of cities affected in recent years grows sadly longer and longer month by month, as those who wish to impose their ideals and values on those they see as enemies to the cause they uphold.

The catastrophic effect of suicide bombers, not only to themselves but to many innocent bystanders as they in a seemingly indiscriminate way bring death and destruction as they give what may be seen as the ultimate sacrifice by those who are voluntarily fighting for what they believe, those who see themselves as willing martyrs, but perhaps even worse an even example are those who have been 'forced' by to engage in such devastating behaviour, those who are often these days no more than children, children who are forced to waste their lives for a cause imposed on them by those who are so blinkered that they are willing to sacrifice innocent lives for what they perceive to be a 'just cause.'

Added to this we see repression by non-elected regimes and occupying forces, both internal and external, just cast an eye towards the Korean peninsula and think about the possible consequences of a lack of reconciliation between the regime there and the western world; something that I suggest this is casting more than a mere shadow over our world at this time.

But, if we look on a much smaller and domestic scale we see different yet for those involved equally devastating examples of the consequences where people have failed to be reconciled, broken marriages, family splits and feuds, longstanding and acrimonious disputes with neighbours and when it happens with in the Christian community, divisions and in some cases splits within churches, some of which are never healed.

I am not for one moment suggesting that Crockham Hill is a community in need of great reconciliation, although we must remember that because of our humanity we are not perfect, and as a Christian community we need to be aware of how we should go about things when there is a need, to be willing to face issues when they come along rather than hoping that whatever 'it' is will just go away. We must be people who are willing to forgive, more of that next week, but we need to be a people who forgive not because whatever 'it'

is doesn't matter but because it does matter; forgiveness says it does matter, it did really happen and 'it' does need to be dealt with, but in a loving way.

Today we look to the teaching of Jesus for our example, for the preferred pathway for each one of us as individuals and as a church community to follow. If we are to grow as a community and a people who are wanting and willing to be an example of living a life that is reconciled in Christ.

¹⁵ *'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.'*

Step one – go and see whoever it is and seek to sort out whatever the problem is, BUT there are of course things to be remembered. You may need courage, dealing with conflict is something that many of us find very hard, something we would much rather avoid. You will certainly need to pray before you go and you will need to go prepared to listen and to hear, to listen to the other person's point of view and to hear that you are part of the problem – remember it does as they say take two to tango. Hopefully that will be the end of the matter and as part of the healing process a stronger and closer bond will have been forged you will have gained 'a brother or sister in Christ,'

But if that fails Step 2 is needed says Jesus -

¹⁶ *'But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.'*

Sometimes whatever the 'it' problem is more people will be needed to help with the reconciliation process. People who are prayerful listeners, those who will listen to both sides, those who will be prepared if necessary to tell some hard truths, to both parties, you included, those who are willing to be supportive to the 'right' of whatever the situation is.

But if that does no good we eventually we come to some very hard words from the lips of Jesus as Step 3

¹⁷ *'If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.'*

To our ears this sounds so harsh, and I would even dare to say un-Christian, but here we are talking about church in the sense of the small local gathering that would still have been meeting in the local synagogue, a small and close-knit group and not a broad congregation as we are here today, no I suggest this is not akin to putting it on the website or in the Pew Sheet, but it does highlight the responsibility the community has to strive as a community

for prayerfully based reconciliation in any situation that is endangering both the individual concerned and the community at large. Here Jesus is clear that there are situations when after every possible avenue has been explored a person may as a last resort be required to leave the fellowship.

But, and I thank God that there is a but, alongside this hard and challenging teaching there are some welcome promises

¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

We are not left alone to deal with things, God is with us and we are assured of a heavenly dimension to our earthly actions.

When we pray together, we will be heard in heaven and our prayers will be answered, not necessarily as we want or think but in line with God's perfect will, because when two or three are gathered Jesus promises that he will be there, not only listening to what we say but also listening to the 'thoughts of our hearts.'

If we take seriously the need to be a community of reconciliation, between ourselves and God, between ourselves and one another, between ourselves and our community, our nation and our world, we may not be promised an easy path, we may have at times tread a costly one, but we will be playing our part in help to keep ourselves and our community focused on God, facing his way, walking his path and not in danger of roaming our own.

I want to leave you with three question to reflect on as we not only prepare to come to God's table, the place of reconciliation as we receive Christ but as we prepare to go out as God's people into the week ahead;

Does God hear us speaking with love?

Does God see us acting with love?

Does God find us thinking with love?

Let's pray

Loving God,

Calm our hearts and still our minds

Fill us with a spirit of understanding

Let us be slow to take offence and quick to forgive

As water finds its way through cracks

Let your peace find its way into our hearts

Let your grace flow through all our dealings

And your love through all we do together.
Amen