

## Sale Anglican Cathedral 13/9/2020

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A master forgives a servant's debt. The servant then goes out and sees another servant who owes him money. The second servant falls on his knees in front of the first and begs for forgiveness. Then there is a touching moment, when the first servant reaches out his hand and lifts the second servant to his feet and says, "Since I have just come from being forgiven by the king, how could I do anything but forgive you?" The second servant rejoices and goes out and spreads the news. The news of the first servant's merciful behaviour reaches the ears of the king. The first servant gets a promotion and then there is a party.

I could even have the king forgive all his debtors.

Ahhhhh ..... my imagination runs away with me. The reality of this story is it ends by pointing out the consequences of not forgiving of the one who refuses to forgive.

And it is not a pleasant consequence.

All the parables unique to Matthew, except for the brief excursion in to the treasure, the pearl, and the fishnet, end with someone's downfall. The unforgiving servant in this parable ends up being tortured in a dungeon (18:34) the weeds get thrown into the furnace of fire (13:42) the labourer who dared to complain about wages is sent packing (20:14) the son who didn't go to the fields is eventually excluded from the kingdom (21:32) and those who did not see Jesus in the destitute go away to eternal punishment (25:46)

Tough stuff. Matthew's parables are teaching us what it means to live a life as followers of Jesus, and this is not easy. This parable focuses on forgiveness and follows on from last week's Gospel reading where the question of disharmony in the faith community is addressed. And Peter asks the question about how often should one forgive? Not once says the writer of Matthew but 77 times.

Like much of our Christian life forgiveness is not easy. It is often said rather glibly "I forgive-you" or sorry and we move on. This reduction of the action ignores the fact that without restitution or reconciliation these are just words. Forgiveness is at its core is about relationship. There is a line in the Uniting Church funeral service that reads:

*Enable us by your grace to forgive N that was hurtful to us.*

This very powerful line in the funeral liturgy sums up that it is only by God's grace that we are truly able to forgive. And perhaps this is what is behind the response Jesus gives in answer to Peter's question. Not 7 but 77 times, referring to an abundance of grace that is immeasurable. God's forgiveness is massive! In the parable the owed amount of debt is also massive, unrealistically so, this amount of debt suggested is more than a life time of wages. A story teller's ploy to help us understand the depth of how much God seeks wholeness for humanity and creation.

It is interesting to note that Matthew has placed this discussion within the context of dealing with wrong and not sweeping it out the door or ignoring the wrongdoing.

Forgiveness is costly, it makes us vulnerable, and disrupts social norms. Costly in terms of the relationship between us (me) and the person that I seeking to forgive, or the person that I am seeking forgiveness from. Forgiveness means giving up something, this may be an attitude, a desire for revenge, or even a relationship. Seeking true forgiveness is opening the

door and allowing ourselves to be loved. And we are invited to hold up a mirror ourselves and our wrong doing. An important part of our being able to forgive the other is to be able to forgive ourselves. How often have we ruminated at night, “Why did I do That? I should have said.....I could of said and so on. We can be very hard on ourselves, I know I can. Once we forgive ourselves it is much easier to forgive others. And forgiveness disturbs the social norms. As we can see in the ongoing struggles for reconciliation with the First Peoples of this country, or the Black Lives Matter movement or the Me Too movement or the cry for capital punishment, or the lust for revenge following 9/11.

Puppet.....



***I`m Awe-some..... and I come form a planet called Awe. On Awe, wonder, curiosity , awe and imagination are part of our DNA. Every so often I visit your planet and wonder what is going on! Each time I visit your planet there seems to me fewer people living with awe, wonder and curiosity. We discovered on Awe that without these things we lose hope and become sick. Imagine a world where people are caring for each other. If enough people imagine change for a better world , then it will happen.***

***That all I want to say.***

One of the courses that Jenny and I had last year was on forgiveness, justice and healing with John Steward. John is a spiritual director with Living Well Centre and spent a number of years in Rwanda following the genocide, coordinating reconciliation and peace building with some NGOs . John's course based on this work challenges the participants to think about forgiveness in their lives and communities. The course and book has many profound stories of forgiveness, reconciliation and justice between Hutu and Tutsi. Stories where wrong is acknowledged, resolution sought, forgiveness offered and accepted.

We have also seen examples of forgiveness and reconciliation during the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. If we only imagine the possibilities of what can be achieved.

One therapeutic approach to forgiveness especially self forgiveness is:

1 Responsibility

Take responsibility acknowledging the wrong done.

2. Remorse

A deep regret for the wrong done

3 Restoration

Of the relationship with self..... Im sorry

4 Renewal or growth

What have we learnt from this experience.

The king forgives all of his debtors, yes it may be my imagination but imagine what that would be like if in the power of the spirit we committed ourselves to forgive self and the other.

Jesus of Nazareth is calling on us to be compassionate and usher in God's culture of mercy, justice and forgiveness, so that all of God's children can live in peace. This is our response to the

I would like to conclude with a poem by Padraig O Tuama an Irish poet, theologian and peace maker from Belfast. Through story and poetry Padraig has been building relationships between catholic and protestant over many years.

This poem called Shaking Hands was written on the occasion of Martin McGuinness the deputy First Prime Minister of Northern Ireland Assembly and the Queen Elizabeth 2 shaking hands. This was the first time in 100 years that a reigning monarch visited Belfast.

The poem refers to the bombing in Omagh. (oh-much) on the 15 August 1998

(Poem below)

## Shaking Hands

27ú lá Meitheamh, 2012

Because what's the alternative?

Because of courage.

Because of loved ones lost.

Because no more.

Because it's a small thing; shaking hands; it happens every day.

Because I heard of one man whose hands haven't stopped shaking since a market day in Omagh.

Because it takes a second to say hate, but it takes longer, much longer, to be a great leader.

Much, much longer.

Because shared space without human touching doesn't amount to much.

Because it's easier to speak to your own than to hold the hand of someone whose side has been previously described, proscribed, denied.

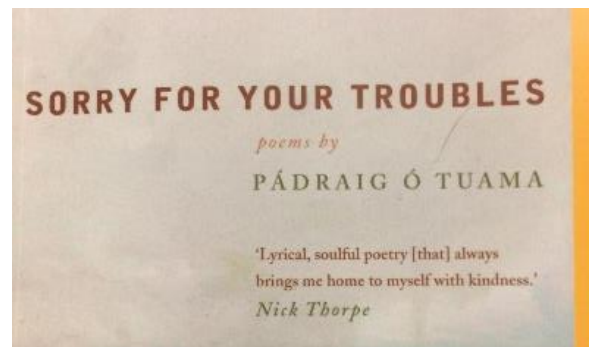
Because it is tough.

Because it is tough.

Because it is meant to be tough, and this is the stuff of memory, the stuff of hope, the stuff of gesture, and meaning and leading.

Because it has taken so, so long.

Because it has taken land and money and languages and barrels and barrels of blood and grieving.



Because lives have been lost.  
Because lives have been taken.

Because to be bereaved is to be troubled by grief.  
Because more than two troubled peoples live here.  
Because I know a woman whose hand hasn't been  
shaken since she was a man.  
Because shaking a hand is only a part of the start.  
Because I know a woman whose touch calmed a man  
whose heart was breaking.  
Because privilege is not to be taken lightly.

Because this just might be good.  
Because who said that this would be easy?  
Because some people love what you stand for, and for  
some, if *you* can, *they* can.  
Because solidarity means a common hand.  
Because a hand is only a hand; so hang onto it.

So join your much discussed hands.  
We need this; for one small second.  
So touch.  
So lead.

In the name of God - Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver - as in the beginning, so now, and  
forever. **Amen**