

St Thomas's Church 28th April 2024: Reconciliation

When you hear the word 'RECONCILIATION' what immediately comes to mind?

- Marriage guidance
- Estranged families
- Reconciliation accounts maybe

For me it was 'mediation', particularly in terms of labour disputes, between employers and unions.

So, what does reconciliation mean? Turning to the Oxford Dictionary, it says:

"The action of restoring estranged people or parties to friendship; the result of this; the fact of being reconciled."

And for any light blues amongst us, the Cambridge Dictionary says:

"a situation in which two people or groups of people become friendly again after they have argued"

Sounds quite straight forward. Both parties say sorry, you shake hands and move on, don't you? But thinking about it, for me the words that now come to mind are the things that cause the estrangement or are a result of estrangement; arguing, hurt, pain, suffering, taking sides, feelings of betrayal; inequality, poverty. Words that fill our newspapers, images and stories of which fill the airways – Israel, Gaza; Ukraine, Russia; Sudan; Syria; Haiti; South Sudan; Pakistan; Yemen and so the list goes on.

It seems that if ever there was a time for reconciliation on the world stage, it is now. Having said that, I'm sure the, "it is now" will have been true at any time down through the centuries.

The Bible says there is more to it than academic definitions. So what does it say.

Its more than the restoration of friendly relations, in the Bible, reconciliation involves a change in the relationship between God and man or man and man. It assumes there has been a breakdown in the relationship, but now there has been a change from a state of enmity and fragmentation (brokenness) to one of harmony and fellowship (completeness, as God intended).

Let's take a brief look:

Colossians 1:20-22 - "and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation."

There's more

2 Corinthians 5: 18-21 – "All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. **And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.** We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

So, reconciliation necessarily involves change. In Christian reconciliation, God does not change. He remains perfect. But He changes us. As a result, our relationship with Him changes.

Reconciliation provided justification “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Because a believer is righteous in God’s sight, he can have a wonderful and new relationship with God in fellowship. The Apostle Paul tells Believers that they are “ambassadors for Christ” and commissions them to implore people to be reconciled to God. This is the mission of the church. We are to implore sinners in Christ’s behalf to be reconciled to God.

So, we are actually looking at the Easter story, or the purpose there of.

Sounds simple: Well, yes, it is AND no it isn’t!?

YES, we simply have to confess our sins and ask God into our lives.

NO, because the hard work then begins.

“The more that you read, the more you know. The more you know, the more you know you don’t know. The more you know you don’t know, the more you read”. *unknown*

Our aim is to be the people he intended us to be. My aim, is to be the person He intended me to be. That to me seems to be a lifetimes work. If we aren’t fighting it, which at times I do and I’m sure I’m not the only one; it should be a mesmerising, wonderful, beautiful journey of discovering new things and new ways of putting a smile on His face.

You know, it can often put a smile on your face to, it certainly does mine at times. That has certainly been the case many times in Uganda. Whilst there I feel far closer to God. It somehow seems easier to rely on Him and to see Him work. I feel we see more God moments when we are there.

When:

- You hear the laughter and see the joy on the faces of a 100 or so teenagers playing games, kids games, like: an egg and spoon race; parachute games and the like. Seeing the fear on the faces of the brand-new students just melt away.
- That some of the staff were previously students at NVI and are now giving back, in spades.
- Preparing just enough food for 100 children, the pile not reducing, not until all 200 that turned up are fed and then and only then suddenly runs out!
- A team member said they’d been given £20 to buy a goat and didn’t know what to do. We met some friends who happened to be raising goats to give to vulnerable woman to help them start a small business.

Whilst in Uganda the different Teams often talk about the fact they feel less weighed down, as though they had left the heavy load they carry round back in the UK, and we all seem freer, more open and aware of our surroundings. That the people we meet seem more spiritual, more open. The fact that we see people looking after each other, with possibly large extended families (people they have effectively adopted) when they haven’t got two pennies to rub together. Is it a simpler life not clouding their vision, is it subsistence living that makes them more dependent on God?

Going back to Paul’s letter, we are “ambassadors for Christ” – that’s quite a statement.

An ambassador is a diplomatic official of the highest rank, sent by one sovereign or state to another as its resident representative.

So, for all intents and purposes we are being Him, that we stand in His shoes! Therefore, what we say and do is so important. Not only are we His hands, His feet, but His mouthpiece also. To truly represent Him we need to be as much like Him as possible, to be the people He intended us to be. If we aren't reconciled with Him; we don't stand a chance of representing Him.

So, to be like Him, do we not strive to be 'good Christians', to follow His teaching and His commands. The greatest of which is (Matthew 22:37-40) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

When I am asked why do you what you do, the simple answer is, "Because God loved me first".

Is that not the reason why any of us do what we do, for our neighbour? Working with asylum seekers; food banks; CAP; the homeless; fostering; reacting to the needs of the communities we find ourselves in, wherever they might be.

Last time I was here I said it took me going to Uganda, to open my eyes to poverty on my own doorstep, back in Timperley and the surrounding area. So, for me, my neighbours are both near and far, because that's where God led me, that's the communities He gave me.

After that very first time I went, so full of apprehension and some trepidation, I didn't like flying, I didn't like the heat, what would the food be like etc. I still don't like flying, or the heat, but I'm still going, 20 years on, because the joy far outweighs the fear. Because God's love conquers fear.

Helen and I were blessed with two children, Simon now 32 and Emma 30, but I feel that over the past 20 years He has given UgandAid and many more foster children, but thankfully not all at the same time!

Yes, over the past 20 or so years, UgandAid has sponsored over 900 student places, raised over £1.1 million, lead over 535 team members, 283 different people introduced to Uganda, to NVI. Seventeen of which have gone on working in Uganda in different areas, to follow what God then placed on their hearts. Working with pre-school kids; projects in a local slum; healthcare training; working with vulnerable woman; building schools; training pastors; evangelism and much more.

We are always excited when someone new joins us on an annual team visit, always wondering what seeds may be sown. We always warn them that you will never completely get the red dust out of your clothes, out of the seams and possibly you may not get Uganda and it's people out of your heart.

Every single Christian is one of Christ's ambassadors' (whether we like it or not, it's in the job description), pleading for the work of repentance, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation to be carried out in every generation, in every community.

This is a serious task and one which cannot be effected simply by laws or licences. As Nelson Mandela wrote: 'In the end reconciliation is a spiritual process which requires more than just a legal framework. It has to happen in hearts and minds of people.' This is where we come in, using our words, our actions, our speech, our gestures, our attitudes and approaches, to advocate for

reconciliation, for the mending of the brokenness of humanity, made possible by the breaking of bread.

No, I can't change the World, but I can make a difference to him, to her, to that family. Who can you make a difference to?

Sadly, reconciliation is not always possible in this world. However, that isn't the end as we are able to put our trust in the coming of the Kingdom, the final reconciliation, when earth and heaven are renewed, when all is healed. Revelation 21: 1, 3-4 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.....He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away".

Lord God, Father of humanity, help me to not only speak about reconciliation but act on it too.