

# The Power of Being Reconciled

12 February, 2017

Reading: Matthew 5:21-37

*Open the Bible to us in fresh and exciting way. In Jesus name. Amen.*

Jesus said, "First be reconciled with your sister or brother and then come and offer your gift."

It was a Sunday evening and I was just about to receive a call that would change my life. Many years earlier I had had a close friend called Sam. Sam and I had been best buds at university. We had done everything together, so when we left the hostel it made sense to go flatting together. Unfortunately, whereas others could have a few drinks, Sam's drinking got worse. By the time I moved out I was really ready to move out. Unbeknownst to me Sam had become an alcoholic. We drifted apart, and it had been many years since we had seen each other. I answered the phone.

"It's Sam here," he said.

"Sam who?" I said.

"I'm going through the 12 step alcoholics anonymous programme, and I have got to stage 8 and 9: to make amends with those we have hurt. I'm ringing to say I'm sorry, [and he listed all the ways he had hurt me] and I want to make amends."

It took him great courage to first, admit his addiction and second, to say he was sorry. This act of courage resulted in our friendship renewed. And from that day to this we have remained good friends. In fact next month he has asked me to speak at his wedding.

Today's Gospel outlines a very powerful process that we follow every time we gather for Eucharist. Firstly we confess our shortcomings, our sins. After that we share the Peace. Then we are, as Jesus said, free to offer our gifts before the altar. This is the time honoured biblical pattern: confession, forgiveness, sharing of the peace, and then the offertory - the offering of our gifts. Of course we offer money and food but in the process we also offer ourselves anew to God. Like Sam, when we are prepared to be vulnerable enough to say we are sorry, then God stands ready with the gift of renewed friendship, both with Himself and with others.

It's easy enough I can hear you saying to be reconciled with others when their sins against us are little, but what if the issue is really big - do Jesus' words still apply?

When she was just 16, Debbie Morris was raped and brutalised, held for 12 hours and then left for dead. Her boyfriend was killed in front of her. Her attacker was

caught and put on death row: sentenced to be put to death. For years this felt like justice. Debbie waited with great expectation for the moment her rapist was to be put to death. He was put to death but, strangely, she felt no better. In fact she began to feel worse. She suffered from depression and nothing seemed to help. About 5 years later she was praying and she saw that in order for her to move on she needed to forgive the man. He had completely ruined her life, but as long as she played the victim, as long as she was unforgiving, he still had power over her. In a moment of blinding realisation, she knew he could have been put to death 500 times and it would never help her. What she needed was forgiveness. It was incredibly difficult, but she embarked on a journey of forgiveness. Her family urged her otherwise. But she found that the more she forgave, the more she set herself free. Forgiveness was the key she discovered to liberating her own life. Today she has completely forgiven the man and tours the country teaching others about the power of Christian forgiveness. If you asked Debbie "Was it an easy journey?" She would say, "No!" If you asked her "Was it a necessary journey?" She would say, "Yes!"

You see God wants us to have fulfilling, happy lives ... and that's why Jesus taught forgiveness. Forgiveness sets us free.

But there is one person we must all be reconciled to. This person I find is the most difficult. I give you some clues as to who the person is. We all know this person. We are related to them in fact I can guarantee that there is one in your family. You probably know more about this person than any other and you live with them 24/7. I refer of course to yourself.

In my experience the most difficult person to accept to love and to forgive is yourself. We do such silly things. We fall short again and again. But, it's only as we accept ourselves as truly loved by God, that we can find the grace to accept others as they are. For as long as we hold out on ourselves, it will be that part of ourselves that we can't love that we find most annoying in another.

We are simply and profoundly loved by God. This is the greatest grace ... and we need to extend this grace to ourselves.

In a moment we come again to the Peace. But do you come in peace? Like Sam, is there someone whom you have hurt and with whom you need to make amends? Like Debbie, is there someone who has hurt you and, even though the fault is all theirs, you need to let the bitterness go? Or is the person you find most difficult to accept yourself?

Let us bring it to God.

Let us pray:

*Loving Jesus, You want us to have fulfilling and joy filled lives ... but we are burdened. We offer to You those we have hurt on life's journey. We offer to You those who have hurt us. And we offer to You the times when we find it hard to love and forgive ourselves. May we begin the process of reconciliation and know the power of Your love this day and forever. Amen.*