

Difficult and mysterious

God of kindness, interrupting our vicious cycles of resentment and revenge: teach us to walk the way of forgiveness beyond all accounting and to love the gift that has no measure; through Jesus Christ, who died for all. Amen
(Prayers for an inclusive church)

Last Sunday, the message prepared by Geoff and delivered by Steve, ended with a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu which I feel is most appropriate to begin today's message - "***If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.***" I just want to remind us of that and see how it will help us embark on today's words from the Gospel of Luke, in what is called his Sermon in the Valley, which in many ways is quite different from what we find in Matthew and his version of the Sermon on the Mount.

What Jesus is presenting us with is a way of being in the world, a way that reflects God's way and is quite different from what the world presents to us. I believe it might be helpful to "enter" this whole passage from the end of it, that is verse 36, because here we find the key not only to the passage but probably to the whole Gospel - ***Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*** The challenge then is to be closer to what God is like, and where we accept that we are recipients of such mercy.

Before saying anything else, I do have to confess my 'inadequacy' when reading this passage and sharing my thoughts with you. I fully understand the meaning of the words and the importance of them, that there has to be an alternative to the way so much goes on in the world, a world where might and power seem to have the final say on matters, where the powerful seem to be the only moral agents in the world. Might is right. No - rarely, if ever, that is true. Quite the contrary, at least seen from the perspective of our Christian faith.

Clearly, when reading this passage, we can assume Jesus' followers, those who are listening to his teachings, are the victims and not the victimisers. "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you/curse you/abuse you...*" and he is asking them to take the initiative not to retaliate. Not to do the same, and right in the middle of the passage, we hear the Christian version of the Golden Rule: **do to others as you would have them do to you.**

How? I need help. YES, without doubt this is essential to our faith because the alternative is a horrendous reality; as Gandhi once said: "*An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.*" I still struggle to forgive and love those who led a coup in Argentina, and tortured, kidnapped, murdered so many; and very few, if any, ever repented from what they did and even said that given the circumstances, they would do it all again. I can't even imagine what these words say to the victims of sexual abuse, domestic violence; those who have experienced the bombing and destruction of their homes, or their land been taken from them, their crops destroyed, those forced into exile and then rejected by the many countries who set up barriers for them to seek refuge.

Can we be expected to proclaim love for these destroyers of life, without demanding from them repentance and change of heart? Don't these things go together? This is why I struggle

with this reading. I would guess all of us would not be part of such destruction to the lives of others, that our actions are probably much less damaging, and so would hope that our reality could be part of what Luke tells us here of what Jesus preached; we would hope to be accepted, we could probably come to repentance of what we have done wrong and hope for forgiveness and then receive mercy.

But how would we approach the matter if we were the victims of such atrocities, and see no repentance from the perpetrators? Over the last months we have prayed for the victims of massacres, of ethnic cleansing, of modern-day slavery, or people bombed and exiled; we have prayed for change in those in power who cause so much hurt and pain. And in my ears ring the words of Jesus today. And I confess my unworthiness, and at the same time I can't ignore it. I can identify with Jonah when God's love changes the people of Nineveh, and Jonah says to God, I knew you were going to do that - why are you so kind to them after all the harm they have caused?

I accept that life is a journey, and I believe that on this journey we are given opportunities to learn, to grow, to develop. I know I pray often for the grace to forgive those I have not yet been able to forgive, I struggle with my brokenness, and believe that God loves me, and I still need to work on my incompleteness.

I pray and hope that the process of reaching this way of living, God's way of living, is the result of God's healing grace, by which we embark on the process of coming closer and closer to God's love for us all. I believe that sharing the bread and the cup in communion today we will be reminded of how different God is to who we are, and ask that in God's grace we will be able to accept God's kindness when his grace reaches out to those whose way of life is grace-less, and would seem to us that it does not merit such love, and that we can reach out to others who are in pain and fear, and become sources of healing and love, that will allow us ALL to become new people, filled with grace and recognizing that we too need to be better people, and that the world as a result of God's grace and mercy becomes the better place it should be.

Thank God that even when we can't fully grasp God's way, in faith and hope, we believe it is the best way. God help us Love as you Love, even when it still is difficult and mysterious.