

Good Friday 2016 (following after 'God of the Mountain' by Bill Loader)

There are many theologies; explanations as to why Jesus was killed on the cross. One is known as the 'atonement', which Jesus had to pay for our sins – as though God needed to be appeased; paid back, as Bill says in the passage we've just heard, the ledger balanced – the debt paid, gives us a sense of control. This way of understanding the cross has in some places become mainstream Christianity but it is not part of our creeds and something I have never agreed with. God is love, not an ego; a mountain God that needs to be appeased, satisfied.

Jesus, who is love: the divine in human form, comes to offer us an invitation to love and he was prepared to do anything to communicate this, share this invitation, even die for it. But the invitation to love, as we know from our own lives is – as much as we long for it – it is scary; to love means to be vulnerable, open, trusting, to surrender control. This means to risk being hurt and wounded.

Christ came with an invitation from God who is love and that challenged and destabilised all the power structures of his day both religious and political.

So what sort of God we believe in is of profound importance and it can take a life time to eradicate a belief in a punitive God from within ourselves.

What sort of God we believe in will guide our choices about the sort of God we will daily chose to follow.

I am sure like me, you find watching the images of the Brussels and Paris terrorism attacks horrifying and listening to the stuff that comes out of Donald Trump even more so – if by some horror he becomes the next president of the USA. Both terrorists and Trump show by their behaviour and speech that they believe in a god of vengeance; a punishing god.

Watching this on the other side of the world can leave us feeling powerless. But as I've been saying throughout our Lent Prayer Workshops there is only one life, situation we can change and even then it is by God's good grace and of course this is ourselves.

If we/you choose to call yourselves Christians and therefore follow Jesus Christ then you will be a person who is ongoingly forgiving; this is the work of love. You can't call yourself a Christian and at the same time say 'I refuse to forgive...' To be Christian is to ongoingly wrestle with forgiveness and even when the pain, the wound is impossible to forgive at the time, we need to be people who are open to forgiving in the future.

It is so easy to talk of a God of love but to follow a God of love demands that we forgive ongoingly – for our own health and healing.

It is an understatement to say this is HARD. But this is where the rubber hits the road when practising our faith.

When we are hurt, when we've been betrayed, denied I think like many of you I find revenge fantasies are my 'go to' place – I want to do to them what

they've done to me or at the very least I want them to know, to feel, how much they have hurt me. Although fantasies have their place - of course to act on them only ever escalates the cycle of violence. To follow Jesus is to utter the words he did from the cross.

Father, forgive them for they know do not know what they are doing.

So even when we can't forgive, when the pain is overwhelming we can hold these people at the foot of the cross and hear Jesus utter these words over them on our behalf until in time we can utter them ourselves.

Father, forgive them for they know do not know what they are doing.

We can't force ourselves to forgive but we can have it as our goal, orientate ourselves towards forgiveness. We need courageous people who chose to stop blaming and can allow themselves to sit with the hurt, the pain, to feel it and allow the tears to flow. It is the hardest thing to do, to be with our hurt selves, but what is most needed. Here in this place as the pain sifts us a new peace can enter a deeper centred place come alive within us. If we want new life, Resurrected life, this step is non-negotiable.

Today as we come to the Veneration of the Cross who is it that you need to forgive? It might be a life situation. Lost opportunities, regrets, maybe it is yourself. Write their name/s, the situation, on the piece of paper provided and leave it, them, in the sculpture of 'our broken world' at the foot of the cross. In this way we surrender them and invite God in. This is no magic fix but it does enable a process to begin, continue and although it might take many years of the doing the same thing, you will notice a shift in how you hold that person, that situation. Today you might be blessed to have no one you need to forgive place at the cross your concern, your prayers. All these will be burned after the service outside the church in the same place where we will light the Paschal fire on Sunday. Please leave today in silence and respect others need for silence.

It was said by Alexander Pope in the 18th century 'that to err is human, to forgive is divine'. Forgiveness is the work of LOVE, it enables love to grow and we need people on our planet, now more than ever before who enable love, who are conduits for God's love to enter the world.

Tielhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest from last century knew unlike the Trumps and terrorists of this world that '*Love is the only force which can make things one without destroying them*'. So we go forward in the hope of Teilhard's prophecy.

Someday after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.