

Forgiveness

On the Wednesday before Easter I led a group of children in a series of meditations on Jesus's last walk. We looked at pictures showing how he was condemned to death by Pilate; how he was helped by Simon of Cyrene; how he tripped and fell; was stripped of his clothes; was crucified and laid in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea.

Most of the pictures were very literal depictions. They did not need much interpretation. But the fifteenth picture was different. It was entitled 'Resurrection'. It showed two figures, one kneeling and the other sitting. They were reaching out their arms to each other, their fingers nearly touching but not quite. So I asked the children a very simple question: 'Who do you think these two people are?' There were many different answers, all of them interesting and valuable. But it was the first response that most grabbed my attention. The first reply was quite immediate and direct: 'it is Jesus for giving Pontius Pilate'.

Forgiving Pontius Pilate? Forgiving the man who condemned him to death because he wanted to keep in the good books of the local Jewish leaders and his boss in Rome? Forgiving the man who did not want to upset the crowd? But I knew that the child was right. At nine or ten years old she had grasped a fundamental truth that eludes so many adults. The truth is that Easter is about forgiveness and reconciliation. And if Jesus can forgive Pontius Pilate who executed him, he can also forgive Thomas who doubted him, Peter who denied him and Judas who betrayed him. And he can forgive me. He can forgive you. And he can also forgive that person whom I cannot forgive.

Easter can be difficult. Forgiveness and reconciliation can be difficult. Sometimes I find it hard to accept that I can be forgiven. Surely I am too nasty and unpleasant for God to love me? Sometimes I find it hard to accept that God can forgive the person I can't. It does not seem fair - but if Jesus can forgive Pontius Pilate perhaps anything is possible. But forgiveness and reconciliation are not nice extras. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not like the fluffy Easter Bunny! Forgiveness and reconciliation are the hard-core of reality. In the end there are two choices in life: we can build heaven. Or we can build hell. If we commit ourselves to forgiving those who have hurt us, to seeking reconciliation, then we will build heaven. But if we go through life promoting bitterness, seeking revenge, then we will build hell. And perhaps the last judgement is quite simply having to live in whatever kind of house we build.

Jesus told those who would listen to him,

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:3

When that child answered my question I knew exactly what Jesus meant!

N Clews

Good Friday
19th April 2019