

Pastor's Note

Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time ~ 10 September 2017

As we look towards our general election later this month it can be very easy to take the sound and fury of a campaign as our image of how our lives should be lived. Politics can only make sense when it involves furious claim and counter claim. Television or radio interviews are structured around the either/or of conflicting positions.

The rush to identify conflict is one of the hallmarks of our world. People are very quick these days to speak of themselves as being outraged or offended, and we are just as quick to identify the culprit. As the poet Les Murray puts it: "Brutal policy, and inferior art, knows whose fault it all is."

The Gospel pictures a very different world from the brutalising insistence upon conflict that mars our society. Jesus knows there will be conflict between Christians. He calls men and women to form the Church in this world in which we live, a world damaged by sin and the consequences of sin. But this conflict is to be wholly and completely moderated by the truth - the truth about God and the truth about ourselves.

In the pattern he gives us when Christians are at odds, when wrong has been done, the first step will be an attempt at private reconciliation. This protects both parties from humiliation, and from forming a public position they cannot back away from. Only when this fails are witnesses brought forward, and after that it is brought before the Church publicly. This is the complete antithesis of our modern world, where we rush to public conflict, and only resort to personal reconciliation when all else has failed.

This reconciliation is not, however, about pretending wrong has not been done. What Jesus calls us to is an unrelenting insistence upon the truth, a commitment to the truth whatever it takes. What becomes clear is that it is not conflict that is the real story. It is the persistent hope that human beings are able to hear the truth about themselves, and to live that truth with joy, knowing that whatever we have been, the Lord is with us. 'When two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' To speak the truth about the actions of others, and more importantly, to hear the truth about myself, is not the source of conflict but of healing.

The world perhaps rushes to present reality as conflict, as it cannot cope with the truth. To know who we have been, how we have harmed our brothers and sisters, can be a burden too heavy to bear. To hear how I have failed another is to be confronted with a picture of myself very different from the one I want to project to others. But at the heart of our faith is the belief that we **can** handle the truth. Indeed that the truth shall set us free. If we believe that then we shall be able to speak, and hear, the truth in love, not in conflict.

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