

## Lent 4

John 9: 1-41 Reflections on Sam Wells's book *Love Mercy*

### Form an Agreement

Today's Gospel essentially talks about the power of listening and who should be listened to. We hear the story of the healing of a man blind from birth. Jesus was asked who had sinned in the case of this man. Jesus replied that neither this man or his parents had sinned but the works of God should be revealed in him and his sight was restored. Then the story stretches into a discussion about who should be listened to. Whose story is considered worthy and credible?

What a remarkable place to pick up our Sam Wells investigation of the steps toward peace and mercy. Wells states that steps 1-6 are soft or difficult to expose to public accountability: become resolved, cease to fight, tell a truthful story, say sorry, make penance, form an agreement. These initiatives need to be taken in order to begin to live differently we have to be aware of trigger factors. Confidence about change requires a written or understood agreement. An agreement is a contract; habits constitute a covenant. Peace starts as one and grows into the other. In order to prevent conflict again the motivations, flashpoints make recurrence inevitable.

A starting place that is vital and transformative is to learn to see the truth as your friend from which you have nothing to fear.

To tell a truthful story it is necessary to be bigger people. The second point is to enjoy and celebrate difference rather than being wary of it. The way to celebrate difference is move attention from verbs and nouns to adverbs and adjectives. For example, the verb disagree becomes gently disagree. Because there are myriad forms of resistance we need to be alert to them. Some are generative and

constructive others are likely to provoke physical retaliation. It is important to talk.

The single practice that counts more than any other is listening. Listening requires its own set of adjectives. Not suspicious, reluctant, enforced, distracted or resentful. But sympathetic, compassionate, curious, appreciative and patient. It is important to allow silence around what another person has said.

Good and through listening is the heart of telling the truthful story it is the difference between making penance and being genuine and transformative.

Final element of making agreement is being realistic. You don't have to have become friends, but you do have to respect each other.

Agreement can only be chiselled out of what has emerged steps 1-5 and most of all the truth telling story.

Post agreement must come a new phase of occasions for gratitude and celebration creating new memories of grace and mercy. A neutral mediator may help in this phase.

Mercy arises at the moment a person uses the power of judgement to heal and restore not to destroy.

## Seek Repentance Chapter 7

At his point we reach into the theological understanding of Jesus as peace. He is the embodiment of God's full presence before humankind.

Jesus encounters defines and enacts the challenges that peace faces, what the practice entails, what costs it incurs. He offers a glimpse into the Trinity he demonstrates the overflowing dynamic self-giving

character of a truly peaceful relationship. Christianity is the coding of transcendental difference as peace.

Peace is the sociality of harmonious difference. An interesting concept! The choice is to embrace difference and foster creative tension rather than fruitlessly eradicate difference and ignore tension in the hope that it will go away. The moment of choice is called repentance.

The recognition is that without God's help one's own sustained resolution and community support there is no hope of breaking the cycle of tension and sometimes violence.

Repentance echoes the moment in a 12 step program where one admits that one admits that one has lost control of one's life and one is powerless on one's own to stop conflict.

As is known in AA, it is important recognize that our life is beyond our control. This requires a partnership between self and God. This requires renunciation of will and turning the will over to God. These are rigorous, uncompromising and daunting steps that delve deep into the heart of the soul.

The final step can be called Evangelism; an enthusiasm born of relishing the fruits of new existence and the willingness to turn bad to good.

This requires changing in-grained habits and behaviours and sometimes humiliating elucidation of harmful actions. The message us not just enter recovery because destruction and oblivion are at hand but repent because it is the way to true joy.

Our gospel story showed folk floundering as they try to decide right and wrong, who has the authority and who should be listened to. Sam Wells tells us that the same issues face us when we face disputes. Who is right and who is wrong? The 12 steps tell us that hurts exist on both sides. **Tension is the place of truth.** The path to

healing is telling the whole story with respect and listening to each other, even when it hurts. And that is what we need more of in this parish church. I find that past hurts are alive and well in this place. If we want to grow this church people are going to have to do some serious listening. I may have been standing here for weeks bleating on a topic of no interest to you. But perhaps some of you have heard an invitation to self-examination. Perhaps you need to tell me your story. I am ready to listen.

It is in respectful listening and in the company of the Holy Spirit that the road to peace may be born.

### Reference

Wells, S. *Love Mercy* Canterbury Press 2020 passim.