

Lent 5 Reflections on Rev Sam Wells book *Love Mercy*

John 11: 1-45

The Raising Of Lazarus

Again it is possible to link the gospel to Rev Sam Well's exploration to mercy. We know the story of Lazarus so well. He was Jesus dear friend who has become unwell and his sisters Mary and Martha send word to Jesus that they are in need of his presence. Jesus responds to the request in a way that the disciples find hard to understand. He explains that the outcome of this illness will bring Glory to God.

Jesus stays two more days where he was. He also tells the disciples that his friend is dead rather than asleep. When Jesus goes to the tomb Lazarus has been dead four days. There are the unforgettable words from Martha to Jesus 'Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you'. Jesus replies 'your brother will rise again.'

Is there latent conflict and disappointment here or is there hope? Jesus replies 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me though he may die, he shall live'. He then calls Lazarus out of the tomb.

Here we see forgiveness in action. Jesus forgives Martha's misunderstanding. Mercy is the outcome of this illness and distress.

So I turn to concluding my reflection on Rev Sam Wells book.

Confession brings together 3,4,5, and 7 the truthful story, apology penance and repentance. Mercy comes with the risk of encounter, trust, understanding, and reconciliation. Out of that comes rebirth. Out of healing and transformation comes an ever-widening circle of grace.

But how do we arrive at this state of acknowledging the need of God's grace?

There must be reconciliation; and that means seeing the future in active relationship with the one who has perpetrated so much harm. Accepting that the other party holds the key to one's flourishing.

Ideally it is in turning the enemy to ally and turning the differences and tension from threats into possibilities, from dangers to life-forces that flourishing occurs. It is imitating the way of the Trinity and in accepting difference that the secret of peace emerges.

This is about seeing the interconnectedness of all relationships. My humanity is inextricably bound up with yours. By reincorporating the terrible story of crimes and wrongdoings severed relationships are reconciled. They harness the energy of that diversity in unity that the Trinity embodies.

At the last supper such a body disintegrated. Jesus held up bread and said this is my body broken for you. There are multiple layers of meaning here. Within minutes the tight-knit body of the disciples was broken. Judas left to betray Jesus and, Peter further broke the bond with his denial and Jesus whose body would be broken. So a community was utterly broken but it can be re-membered in God. God re-members us. This is what the Resurrection is. Reconciliation is an icon of Resurrection.

Reconciliation is the human project; with God, one another, the self and the earth. **Reconciliation is the gospel** and also the whole life of God. There is nothing that is of God that is not constantly about the work of Reconciliation. The victim and perpetrator will always be linked and the latter may come to understand what they have done and may long for forgiveness. If so all steps 1- 10 will need to be negotiated.

Steps 11 -12 are gifts of the HS rather than of human endeavour and will. Can we say; 'I am older and wiser, a deeper person wounded

with scars but I would not be the person I am without this experience.’ Healing isn’t about removing pain, it is about not being dominated by it. This is about more than resilience it is about restoration of the broken and despoiled gift.

The healing stories of the Gospels and miracles are not just displays of power. They are about how God heals in the world of Jesus. Are we paralysed by the hurt that has befallen us? Have we allowed the damage to put us in a personal prison? If God says here is forgiveness and here is healing, which is easiest for us to accept? The prison or the healing?

Personal healing will take different forms for different people. It won’t be like the joy that came to Mary and Martha when Jesus was able to restore their brother to them. Perhaps they would hold the trauma of the four days that they waited on Jesus and the drama they felt at laying Lazarus to rest. Perhaps their joy was able to blot out their pain.

Our world of hurts and pains is different because of our distance from the events written in the gospel story. However, we have access here and now to God the Father, and the Son through the Holy Spirit. We can lean into the power of the Trinity seeking a path through all that we have learnt according to Well’s teaching on the power of Mercy. I sincerely hope that you will take this information into your heart and your prayer-life as you consider the up-coming referendum on the Voice to Parliament. Surely now you know more about the need to tell the story and listen to one another if Mercy and healing are to be achieved.

Thanks be to God.