

Luke 6 v 27-38 Love your enemies St Michael's 6.30pm 16 02 25

This evenings Old Testament reading is a story of reconciliation and forgiveness in a situation where a family has been torn apart by unkindness the unkindness of a group of brothers towards one of their half-brothers which saw the victim sold into slavery and transported to a foreign land. In the end the victim Joseph rises to a position of authority and his brothers who are suffering from the effects of a protracted time of famine come to him for help not knowing that he is the brother they had persecuted.

Very soon we will be welcoming Mary Gregory as our new bishop. At present she is a canon of Coventry Cathedral with special responsibility for reconciliation.

Coventry was badly bombed in the 2nd world. On the night of 14th November 1940, the city of Coventry was devastated by bombs dropped by the Luftwaffe. The Cathedral was hit by several incendiary devices and burned with the city.

The morning after its destruction, the decision to rebuild the cathedral was

taken. Rebuilding would not be an act of defiance, but rather a sign of faith, trust and hope for the future of the world.

Shortly after the destruction, the cathedral stonemason, Jock Forbes, noticed that two of the charred medieval roof timbers had fallen in the shape of a cross. He set them up in the ruins where they were later placed on an altar of rubble with the moving words 'Father Forgive' inscribed on the Sanctuary wall. Another cross was fashioned from three medieval nails by local priest, the Revd Arthur Wales. The Cross of Nails has become the symbol of Coventry's ministry of reconciliation.

The ruined Cathedral and the new building stand side by side.

In Berlin on the Kurfürstendamm is the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. The original church on the site was built in the 1890s. but like Coventry Cathedral was badly damaged in a bombing raid during the second world war in 1943.

Following the war, several different options for the church's redevelopment were considered, including the construction of a new church made from glass in the old church's ruins, and also its complete demolition and replacement with a new structure. Eventually it was

decided to leave the ruined tower as a memorial to the futility of war, and create a new church around it.

The new church was consecrated on May 25, 1962 - the same day as the new Coventry Cathedral.

So, from destruction and devastation rose the new buildings a British cathedral and a German church a sign of hope in our broken and divided world but also a reminder of the destructiveness of war and Christ's command to forgive and to love our enemies.

The words 'Father Forgive' which were inscribed on the wall behind the Altar of the ruined Cathedral building, are used as the response in the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation, which is prayed in the ruins every Friday at noon.

The Gospel passage which we have just read speaks of loving our enemies and not judging others. It draws on a passage about the law as set out in the Hebrew scriptures, but Jesus' teaching goes beyond the of loving your neighbour and hating your enemy.

The point being made to the Jews who were listening is not to follow the old adage of revenge taking an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth but to “Treat others the same way you want them to treat you”, not with judgement and condemnation but with generosity and forgiveness.

It is a message which takes a step into a deeper understanding of the love of God for fallen humanity. “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Jesus is very firm in his directive that no one has a right to criticise others unless they themselves are free of faults. And that knowledge should perhaps help us to be compassionate and merciful in our dealings with our fellow human beings, if we remember this simple fact that none of us is

perfect, we all, each and every one of us, fall short in the sight of God. We are flawed human beings which in his love and mercy, God in Christ, has restored to a right relationship with Him.

One of the post communion prayers in the common worship service says
Most merciful Lord your love compels us to come in.

Our hands were unclean, our hearts were unprepared; we were not fit even to eat the crumbs from under your table. But you, Lord, are the God of our salvation, and share your bread with sinners. So, cleanse and feed us with the precious body and blood of your Son, that he may live in us and we in

him; and that we, with the whole company of Christ, may sit and eat in your kingdom.

Love and mercy are things we are to *live* as Christians, not just hear and talk about.

We pray Lord have mercy upon us.

But words in worship must be translated into action.

Can we offer to others, whoever they may be, less than we have received from our loving and merciful God?