



# Community as reconciliation in conflict

w/c 3 November 2024

*"In the end, reconciliation is a spiritual process, which requires more than just a legal framework. It has to happen in the hearts and minds of people." (Nelson Mandela)*

Dictionaries have a range of meaning for 'reconciliation', usually around thoughts of re-establishing friendly relations or gaining agreement. The Greek word in the New Testament usually translated as reconciliation carries a literal meaning of "friendship restored". This thought of restoration is important. It is often said that positive relations are built, not on the absence of conflict, but rather on the good resolution of conflict – on conciliation. Do you have experience of this in your lives?

Reconciliation is also a key element of Jesus' mission here on earth – see 2 Corinthians 5:18 which also makes it clear that this mission has been passed on to us.

## **Read Ephesians 4:25–32**

How can we learn ways of being angry and not letting that become sin? It is important that we can be angry at some injustice, pause that anger (as the sun goes down) and yet still be sufficiently concerned to act upon it the next day and through the following weeks if necessary. Can you think of examples in your own lives?

Just what is righteous anger? And oft quoted example would be Jesus and the temple traders. Who or what would be their equivalents today? Perhaps more relevant for us would be Nehemiah's response to the exploitation of the poor in his community – see Nehemiah 5:6. How might we become more aware of such injustices in our own community today? It was easy for Nehemiah to act on his discoveries. What options are open to us?

## **Read Matthew 18:15–22**

This is not about church discipline, it's rather about restoration of friendships within the church. I've heard it described as being how we handle the space between 'I'm sorry' and 'I forgive you'.

These words were uttered before there was any idea as to what a Christian church would look like. Jesus though was surely laying the foundations for the centrality of relationships being key to its life. The NIV has a rather blunt take on how the reconciliation should be approached!! The Message puts it this way: *"If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you."*

How do we reconcile these thoughts with Jesus' earlier command that only those who are without sin should be in the business of casting stones (John 8:7)? Or that we should not approach another about their faults until we are certain that we have sorted out all our own (Matthew 7:3-5)? Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminded us of the central necessity of forgiving the sins of others (Matthew 6:15).

One final thought: too often we take verse 20 out of its context here – it's meant to inform the process described in verses 15 to 17 here rather than be of solace at some poorly attended prayer meeting!

*"True reconciliation is never cheap, for it is based on forgiveness which is costly. Forgiveness in turn depends on repentance, which has to be based on an acknowledgment of what was done wrong, and therefore on disclosure of the truth. You cannot forgive what you do not know." (Desmond Tutu)*