

# It's a big ask

2 Samuel 11:1-15, Ephesians 3:14-2; John 6:16-21

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We've been hearing about the not-so-good side of David for a few weeks now. The Bible paints a very different portrait of the King from the cartoon-like characters taught in our Sunday schools.

Last week I sidestepped whether he was a *good* king in preference for was he a successful king. He was. The point of last week's story was that David achieved great things. He unified Judea. While David wouldn't get his temple, he would create the house, the lineage, that would lead right up to Jesus and beyond to a greater kingdom.

Every week, I have a zoom conversation with my brothers and sisters in ministry. It is a wide-ranging discussion that is both pastoral and stimulating. It is also supposed to be a bit of a brainstorm around the lectionary. We all have different gifts and some contribute clearer translations; or more historical data and references and relationships to other texts. Some contribute resource suggestions or personal experience and stories. As I said, it is free-wheeling.

So, this week, mired in David's appalling behaviour to Bathsheba and Uriah<sup>1</sup>, the conversation slid into a tirade about the treatment of women and how keeping mum perpetuates the injustices. My colleagues pointed out theologians they once loved that now they don't quote at all because of revelations about predatory behaviour.

That led us to talk about some of the points raised in the ABC Annabelle Crabb series, *Ms Represented*. And the slow, slow investigation into Ms Higgins allegations of rape in Parliament House. At the climax of the discussion, one of my colleagues spoke with a great deal of passion and concluded 'no good fruit grew from a wicked vine'.

I challenged her. Does that mean Bill Clinton was a bad president because he couldn't keep it to himself? YES! She said. But 'hang on' another Minister said, 'I like Woody Allen films. I don't condone what he did in any way but he was one of the only directors of his time portraying women as strong, intelligent characters'. WRONG she said!

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<sup>1</sup> Nobody names their kid's Uriah anymore. Why's that?

So I asked, Is Phillip Roth a bad writer because he was a turkey? Affirmative. Does that mean Chomsky's language acquisition theory and all his research is useless? She said nothing.

And Edgar Allen Poe's poetry is not beautiful because he was a creep?

That she launched into and dismissed on the basis that he was mentally ill. (He was not, by the way. An addict, yes, but not ill.)

So then, I rolled out the big guns and went back to the text – if no good fruit can grow from a wicked vine, where does that leave us with the God's promise to David – and 1 Matthew?

At that point, we changed the subject...but I kept thinking.

We're not talking about the sins of the father but rather the father's sins.

Yesterday, we had the grief workshop. It was a workshop designed to help those walking with others in grief to recognise the signs of renewal – and encourage them – and the signs of being stuck and help them over the bumps.

The elephant in the room with grief is often forgiveness. So, at the risk of repeating myself – that is where I want to go. I talked about forgiveness in September last year so if you want to brush up, go to the web page and re-read. "Oh, what a lovely ball of wool...". It is based on Matthew 18:21-35, where Jesus tried to teach forgiveness in a parable.

Forgiveness can be a gate-keeper that prevents growth and renewal. Sometimes we can't move on because we are still angry. Angry at them for leaving us; or for things they did – or didn't do. Angry because somethings are unfinished or can't be fixed. Angry at ourselves for *not* speaking up, or not doing something. Angry at ourselves for having confused emotions – you can hate a parent for beating you but love them as a parent...so there is all this judgement involved. Sometimes we turn our grief into anger, take it out on others and then are stuck in our sad place because we can't forgive ourselves or don't think others can.

Not believing in other people's capacity for forgiveness is often what holds addicts in their addiction. They hate themselves on *behalf* of others. That's why AA makes followers go out and ask.

It is complicated and forgiveness is difficult. I've said it before and I will say it again, forgiveness is **hard**. Yet, we ask God every week – and we are mostly confident, He/she does. Are we asking too much – of ourselves?

So what is it we are asking for?

Forgetting is not forgiving. Tolerance is not forgiving; deciding not to let something rule your life is not forgiving; grudgingly bestowing 'forgiveness' on someone is a power-play, not forgiving. There's a parable on that, somewhere.

Forgiving frees us.

A long time ago, my friend and I were invited into a marae to be welcomed and worship with a Maori community. You know every part of a meeting house is sacred. The door lintel signifies going from one realm and entering another. The posts represent the ancestral lines. Once you have been invited in (and there is a whole ritual before that happens), the first thing you must do is go to the wall of ancestors and give thanks for the gifts they have given you. My friend and I were led to the wall which was covered with photographs: old and new; in military uniforms; graduation gowns; studio portraits; brownie snapshots and school photos. A massive wall of complete strangers.

We stood there – and our hosts waited expectantly.

My friend and I are both children of alcoholics. It was a secret that joined us in conspiracy. It was perhaps a point of pride that despite, or perhaps even in spite, of our poor mothering, we had grown well and made something of ourselves. We stood there staring at the wall – with soft tears forming.

My mother was a mean drunk. She was smart and cruel. My 20-year rage kept *me* imprisoned but it also propelled me to success.

I'm staring at this wall and having to confess: she was talented. Her artistic aptitude had no limits. She was smart. She was curious and a life-long learner. She fostered my love of reading and of art. She taught me taste and design. She had a sense of style that was chic. Her English was impeccable and she taught me to love languages.

The next time I saw my mother, she wasn't a monster. She couldn't hurt me. She was a tiny old lady who was not worldly.

I blamed my mother for everything she hadn't told me – and when I met her as an adult, I could see how little she knew. My compassion overflowed.

Is the fruit of her vine no good?

Real forgiveness comes from the heart, is truly divine, is usually based on engagement, understanding, letting go (and a lot of hard work) and is truly, absolutely freeing. It takes a person through a process of investigation, understanding, acceptance and ritual that creates not only a safe space but a distance between the event, the alleged perpetrator, and the 'victim'. A space that allows miracles to happen. In my case – a wall in New Zealand. I really did pass into another realm.

The more horrific the crime – the harder it gets for sure. But where are we in this picture when we are not the victims? Do we stop reading their books? Do we pull down their statues? Do we judge David more kindly than a 20<sup>th</sup> century perpetrator? I don't know. Today, somewhere in NSW, there will a chaplain companioning a paedophile in his prayers.

I do know, the Bible tells us God loved David. But then God loves everybody – so what do I do with that?

God's mission has always been reconciliation and that cannot happen without forgiveness. I know that in believing, God forgives me.

God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself,  
not counting our trespasses against us,  
and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

2 Corinthians 5:19

While we were still weak,  
at the right time Christ died for the ungodly Romans 5:6

God is love.

Through Christ your sins are forgiven.

Take hold of this forgiveness

and live your life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But the hard part is our role in forgiving others. Perhaps, where possible, gratitude is the antidote. To stand in front of that wall and say thank you for the gifts was a prophetic moment. I am the woman I am in many ways, because of her. Perhaps, not always, even in trauma, I have heard people confess their gratitude. Things like "I would not have been a writer if I did not lose my legs" or "my injury brought this broken family back together."

And so finally, I turn to the Ephesians reading. I was hoping you would hear it as the prayer and blessing it was meant to be.

We are called to make peace with each other and ourselves. Knowledge is not enough. The divine has a bigger role. It is not the church of God that has a mission but the mission of God that has a church.

We can't restore heaven on earth without starting with forgiveness. But, **It is hard.**

The parable of Matthew 18:21 says there is no price, no currency on forgiveness. So how much are you willing to pay?

I have here a bucket of tears. Because of COVID social distancing I can't invite you up safely and in a timely fashion. It would take us an hour.

But

If you have a stone in your heart – let's free it. I invite you, after the service has finished – to come up before you leave (anytime during morning tea) and drop your rock. It's time to be free.

*Generous God, I will try and keep on trying to love the world as you do.*