

Let it go

Gen45:3-11, 15; Luke 6:27-38

Love thine enemy is simply impossible because to be an enemy, by definition is to be hated not loved. If you change that dynamic, would they still be an enemy?

Last week, I talked about how our notion of 'love' and 'happiness' in our cultural context is miles apart from what was meant in the Bible. There are many kinds of love we know – the Greeks make a big thing of it using 9 different words for different types of relationships¹ which range from romantic to pragmatic and include soul-mate and duty. Modern Hebrew, by the way, has only one word '*ahava*' which is multipurpose for both 'love' and 'like' – not a romantic lot, the Israelis.

But even the Greeks missed the point sometimes. To 'love' in the biblical context of these readings is to be *like* God, merciful. With Joseph the love of family (the Greeks have a word for that) *and* the love of God – meant he could be merciful. And that is what Jesus was calling us to do. We can't adore our enemies (otherwise they would be something else) but we can act in a more spiritual way by being merciful and seeking understanding.

The PM got in a bucket of trouble this week giving a speech in Parliament on Sorry Day – the day that recognises the stolen generation. It was a beautiful speech based much on today's readings. He said it is easier to say, 'sorry' than to forgive and he is right... But his comments were taken as a pointed call for the stolen generation to get over it.

That is not always possible. The passion, hostility and bitterness can soften over time but the scars are still there. The ramifications reverberate on through generations. Even suggesting they forgive now is like saying to someone to get over your grief. "Yea, yea, they're gone but that's in the past." Who has the right to be the self-appointed authority on your pain?

Suggesting that we be merciful with each other is a different story.

And that is where we are in NADOC week, Sorry Day and Common Grace – worshiping and celebrating together and learning culture and language builds

¹ *Philia, Pragma, Storge, Eros, Ludus, Mania, Philautia, Agape and Meraki (Modern Greek)*

hope for closer relations and better understanding. Then we would not feel like enemies,

On a personal level – Geoff and I have been cleaning out our filing cabinets and lo and behold! We have found things we are proud of... *and* documents from dissolutions, disputes, injustices and painful encounters with people out to do harm. We'd kept the documents ready to defend ourselves again or as a record of unfairness.

As we uncovered each of the documented unpleasantries, we read the files; we talked about many of them; and then, we threw them away. Why hold onto it? The Greeks also have a word for this, *philautia*: self-love.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle believed that self-love is a prerequisite to loving others. Healthy self-love is beneficial to every aspect of life, including relationships, and individuals who love themselves are usually more capable of both giving and receiving all kinds of love.

In our context, discussing then throwing away those files was letting the evidence be shredded, even if the scars remain. It was a moment to stop judging and judging and nurturing our grievances. It was an act of mercy on ourselves. And as close as we can get to forgiving our enemies.

The first act of forgiveness is letting go – not holding grudges tightly, then, forgiveness is possible. But only the injured person can make that choice.

God is merciful even to the undeserving. Jesus' final comment on the measurement is a reminder that God's measure is not justice but mercy.