

Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the 'Eight Days'

5 June – 12 June 2011

Day 8 – Sunday 12 June

CALLED FOR THE SERVICE OF RECONCILIATION



Readings

Genesis 33:1-4

Esau ran to meet Jacob, and embraced him...and they wept

Psalms: 96

Say among the nations, 'The Lord is King!'

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

God...reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation

Matthew 5:21-26

Leave your gift before the altar, and go: first be reconciled to your brother or sister...

Commentary

Our prayers of this week have taken us on a journey together. Guided by the scriptures, we have been called to return to our Christian origins – that apostolic Church at Jerusalem. Here we have seen devotion – to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. At the end of our reflections on the ideal of Christian community presented to us in Acts 2:42, we return to our own contexts – the realities of divisions, discontents, disappointments and injustices. At this point the Church of Jerusalem poses us the question: to what, then, as we conclude this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are we called, here and now?

Christians in Jerusalem today suggest an answer to us: we are called, above all, to the service of *reconciliation*. Such a call concerns reconciliation on many levels, and across a complexity of divisions. We pray for reconciliation among Christians, so that the Church might be a sign and instrument for the healing of political and structural divisions and injustices; for reconciliation between Australia's first peoples, all who have come as immigrants, and those who come as refugees to these shores; for the just and peaceful living together of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim peoples; for the growing in understanding between people of all faiths and none. In our personal and family lives, too, the call to reconciliation must find a response.

Jacob and Esau, in the Genesis text, are brothers, yet estranged. Their reconciliation comes even when enduring conflict might have been expected. Violence and the habits of anger are put aside as the brothers meet and weep together. The recognition of our unity as Christians – and indeed as human beings – before God leads us into the Psalm's great song of praise for the Lord who rules the world with loving justice. In Christ, God seeks to reconcile to Himself all peoples. In describing this, Paul, in our second reading, celebrates a life of reconciliation as "a new creation". The call to reconcile is the call to allow God's power in us to make all things new, to be ambassadors of Christ's reconciliation.

Once again, we know that this 'good news' calls us to change the way we live. As Jesus challenges us, in the account given by Matthew, we cannot go on making offerings at the altar, in the knowledge that we are responsible for divisions or injustices. The call to prayer for Christian unity is a call to reconciliation. The call to reconciliation is a call to actions – even actions which interrupt our church activities.

For Reflection/Discussion

- To what or to whom are we called to be reconciled – as individuals; as churches; as a nation?
- What are 'the habits of anger'? How can they be put aside?
- Discuss the statement: "There can be no reconciliation without justice".
- Our national 'Week of Prayer for Reconciliation' is observed annually 27th May – 3rd June. Does your local church participate in this? have contact with indigenous people? Share what you know about what your denomination is doing in reconciliation, mission and co-operation with indigenous Australians.

Prayer: God of Peace, we thank you that you sent your Son Jesus, so that we might be reconciled to yourself in Him. Give us the grace to be effective ambassadors of reconciliation within our churches. In this way help us to serve the reconciliation of all peoples, particularly in your Holy Land – the place where you demolish the wall of separation between peoples, and unite everyone in the body of Jesus, offered on Mount Calvary. Fill us with love for one another; may our unity serve the reconciliation that you desire for all creation. We pray in the name of Christ, through whom God was pleased to reconcile all things in heaven and earth, making peace by the blood of the Cross. Amen.