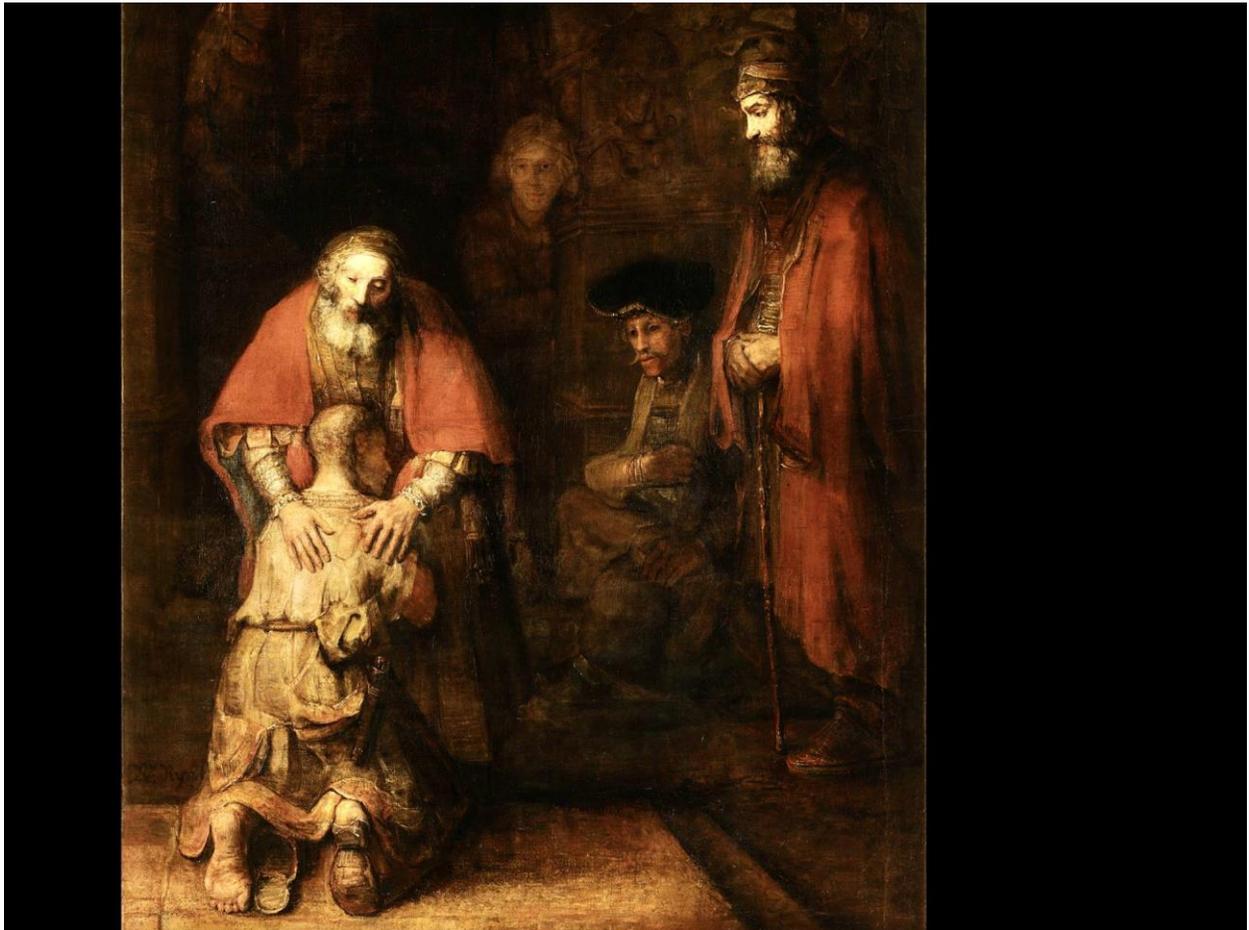


A FURTHER REFLECTION ON THE COMPLEXITY AND BEAUTY OF OUR WORK FOR A MORE LOVING, FORGIVING AND UNDERSTANDING CULTURE.

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We are working for the repair of a culture in which there has been much suffering and in which there continues to be violations of one another and of our planetary life.

We work for a time, as the artists say, when there will be many ancient trees; living creatures of every kind; only the good. A time when there is no reason to look away from what we see.



THREE FURTHER REFLECTIONS FOR LOCAL CONVERSATIONS:

1.

Rembrandt's painting above of Jesus' parable in Luke 15 focuses on the return of the prodigal son. He portrays the absolute and unconditionally loving forgiveness that the prodigal receives. The father, transcending all the constraints of his patriarchal culture, runs to meet the boy and embraces him with such full compassion that his son's shoe falls off!

Jesus is saying, such is the love of God towards us in our prodigal ways. As Julian of Norwich was granted to see around 1373, “the love in which God made us was in God from without beginning”.

Jesus is also saying, this is how we should aspire to live with one another.

Richard Holloway reflects... “the father’s outpouring of love caused a true change in the son, so that we might say that the forgiveness that was unconditionally given actually caused the repentance that followed it...” (Richard Holloway ‘On Forgiveness ‘Canongate Books 2015).

We have been sharing stories from Germany, Egypt and our Australia of how individuals, filled with divine compassion, have been able to offer such a quality of forgiveness after matters of unspeakable sadness.

Further, how this can sometimes lead to a redemptive narrative which even includes the original perpetrator of the person's suffering!

2.

Whilst we may comprehend how this is attuned to the love of God visible in Jesus, we must be careful not to assume or suggest that such a quality of pure forgiveness should be how people must immediately respond to abuse and injustice .

As Richard Holloway says, “We only add to the trauma if we try to urge or hurry people into a forgiveness they are humanly incapable of offering...we have to go further and acknowledge the appropriate moral force of the refusal to forgive and the sense of revulsion that the very thought of forgiveness induces in the victim”(p53).

This is so, even as we appreciate that the consequence of this choice may be “a life sentence of bitterness” and a stealing of the future.

People may well recognise this will be the case but may still find their dignity, for now , in refusing to forgive.

In our culture currently, we know there are people who want their voices heard. They do not want an exercise in forgiveness that would seem designed to silence them before they have been properly heard and have been able to convey all of what they think is now fair and just.

Voices of righteous indignation are many and for good reasons:

Our First Nation people; women who are a minority in male political and other cultures; those who have suffered from institutional child abuse; asylum-seekers who yearn for a place to settle; people who are without vaccines or health care where the pandemic is raging.

Nurturing a more loving, forgiving and understanding culture involves much patient and careful listening, wherever we have opportunity.

Listening that therefore does not interrupt; that asks open and not closed questions, that seeks clarification rather than presumes to know what the other person is saying. Listening that will keep matters confidential and will be attentive to tones of voice in dialogue.

Listening that leads on to an empowering plan of action.

3.

One other important consideration is given for us by the example of the prodigal's father.

Such Jesus- like pure compassion, such pure grace can have a transformative effect on people and events.

Richard Holloway writes that when it happens, "it casts not only light but silence all around, in which one by one, the eager voices stop their clamour for revenge and fade away, the way the men who called for the stoning of the woman caught in adultery crept off the scene when Jesus invited the one without sin to cast the first stone." (John 8:1-11)

Felicity McCallum and I have reflected on this Gospel story in relation to exercises involving stones suggested by Desmond and Mpho Tutu in "The Book of Forgiving".

One exercise involves choosing a stone, carrying it through the day; then imagining that carrying the stone is like carrying an unforgiven hurt. We are encouraged to then make a list of those we need to forgive and a list of those who we would like to forgive us.

Putting that work in may help us to better offer and encourage the quality of leadership needed now.

That is, leadership able to transcend divisions and unite opposite forces in the peace of forgiveness.

Leadership of the kind that we saw in the noble example of Nelson Mandela; leadership that offers mercy to former enemies. Leadership, that is, which helps us to forgive what previously seemed unforgivable.

CONCLUSION.

Local conversations on these matters are backed by our prayers for how we help our culture be more loving, forgiving and understanding.

Dear Jesus,

we thank you for your providence and presence as we try to follow in your Way.

We see your example of radical forgiveness in your Gospel teaching, unto the Cross of our salvation.

We pray for your inspiration as we continue our pilgrimage together.

Help us see the next steps. Help us reach that place where there is no reason to look away from what we see.

By your grace and our support of each other, may we be your beatitude:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God.” AMEN.

Forgive - The Way Forward

