

May I speak in the name of God, who has formed us, who loves us, and who calls each one of us by name

I want you to think about the last film or tv programme you watched, or maybe a book you read, a play you saw, or a radio show you listened to. Particularly thinking about one where two of the characters have an argument or disagreement that results in them falling out and not talking to one another – fans of soap operas should find this quite easy. At some point, either by the end of the film or book – or maybe a couple of episodes later if you're watching or listening to a soap – they sit down, sort out their differences and work on rebuilding their relationship.

Now think about a time you disagreed with someone, to the point where it affected your relationship with them (it may not be as dramatic as in Emmerdale or The Archers). How long did it take you to sit down, sort out your differences and work on rebuilding that relationship?

Reconciliation is a big issue today. We hear too often of what can happen when reconciliation fails to occur – terror attacks, heavy handed repression. But in smaller situations too, family or neighbourly feuds, divided communities or churches. It can seem simpler to bottle up the feelings, hide them away and pretend as if everything is ok – when in reality it isn't. And as we continue to push the feelings aside, they only get worse,

the anger or resentment building up inside until it is no longer possible to pretend.

Reconciliation goes beyond forgiveness, focussing on restoring broken relationships. You may be quick to forgive someone who has wronged you, but it may take time to heal the relationship broken by that wrong – certainly longer than a couple of episodes.

In our first reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul reminds the Romans that by loving their neighbour as they do themselves they are fulfilling the law – "owe no one anything, except to love one another". We commonly see this as a single command "Love your neighbour as yourself." But in Paul's later letter to the Corinthians he highlights the complexities of love – a common reading at weddings.

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

I want to think a moment about this passage and the complexities of love.

Are we as part of this community of mercy and kindness – patient? ... Kind? ... unenvious? ... unboastful? ... unarrogant? ... unrude? ... unirritable? ... unresentful? ... Do we insist on our own way? ... Do we rejoice in wrongdoing but not the truth? ... Do we bear all things? ... believe all things? ... hope all things? ... endure all things? ...

Reconciliation needs love – and if love is complex – then so too is reconciliation.

Thinking back to your fictional characters they can, at times, make reconciliation look effortless. And you may question how they are able to reconcile given what they did. It would be easy to say that the script writers or authors make it that way. It's effortless because it's not real. And in some cases that's true. We don't always know the internal feelings of the character, what they have overcome in their own minds to reach that point.

In today's gospel we are presented with a solution to reconciliation but only if all voices are able to be heard.

Talk to the person, one on one. Share your disappointment and if they listen to you and you are able to listen to them – good news – you're reconciled.

Except actually taking that first step could be the most challenging, especially if the hurt is great. It will take courage to approach someone and point out their faults, and it may be difficult to find that courage potentially putting ourselves in a vulnerable position by sharing the pain and hurt we have felt – something we typically avoid doing. We are taught to think that this is a sign of weakness rather than a strength.

Sometimes, however the pain and hurt we feel may not be because of a single person or group of people but towards a situation. This is particularly true of our current situation - we are restricted on what we can and can't do and where we can and can't go and who we can and can't see.

This pain and hurt was seen in some of the feedback we received when asking you to reflect on your current church experience.

No one person is to blame.

When we feel pain and hurt towards a situation, it can be unclear who to share the pain with. A number of you shared the pain and hurt felt at not being able to worship in our buildings and the anger and frustration of feeling excluded because of your age.

I want to thank you for sharing that with us.

It is a first step towards reconciliation, and a step that we in this community of mercy and kindness take together to discern what the spirit is saying to the churches.

So, as we gather together this morning in the sacredness of our hearts and homes, we remember that God is with us, loves us and takes these steps with us always.

Amen