

### **What You Bind on Earth**

“Truly I tell you, that whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” It is a confronting thought that what we do here and now has eternal consequences; that how we treat one another changes things in heaven as well as here on earth; and that whether another person is bound or loosed might be dependent upon us!

Confronting though it is this is the spiritual, psychological and social truth isn't it, if we reflect for a moment? We see it in families – where there has been a falling out and a binding of one member to a terrible event or memory and that view keeps one member away from the rest of the family for months or decades. It takes an act of loosing, of forgiving or letting go or reconciling, for family member to be restored to another family member. We see it in social groups - churches and service clubs where one person or group is seen as having acted wrongly and they are bound by history and reputation to their failure and the division remains until there is a loosing of those bonds. And we see it in nation states where debt and injured national pride becomes a limiting and perpetuating bond that prevents new life or direction until and unless another party can forgive the debt and offer a loosing of prejudice.

Our readings this morning also make it clear that it is the spiritually blessed and mature one, or chosen one, who must take the initiative in this. The prophet must warn the people or else the consequences of their sin will be upon him! The member of the faith community who is aware of a division must act to resolve it starting with the simplest and most private intervention possible and only going public if this fails.

Those of us on the faith journey must be prepared to be the first to act but we are not held solely responsible for the outcome! We cannot be, we can only do our part with wisdom and compassion. It is a blessing if a word or act of warning or reconciliation has the desired effect but if not there may sometimes be a need for a non vengeful separation or exclusion. The expression Jesus uses is to let that one be as a Gentile and a tax collector. And we know how Jesus treated tax collectors – with compassion and with invitation to new life.

There is however no suggestion that wrong doing be ignored or covered up or minimised. On the contrary Scripture suggests that wrong doing must be named and confronted and then forgiven and the wronged and the wrongdoers restored to one another.

And as a different way of exploring another aspect of the same dilemma of human belonging and behaving well toward one another what about the situation where wrong doing seems to happen because there is not enough connection? Sometimes we may look at the behaviour of young, or older, lone wolves who seem to act in anti social ways because they are not bound to the group, not bound to the usual rules of behaviour. Now without wanting to suggest that there are not

group rules that need to be challenged there does seem to be a time for seeking to bind the individual to the group for their own and everyone's wellbeing. Sometimes expecting and requiring good behaviour of the outsider is the most inclusive and redemptive thing that you can do. Confusing? Maybe a story from another tradition helps to illustrate how confronting someone with their behaviour can be part of healing rather than punishment.

In a native American Indian tribe among the women there was a tradition for dealing with relationship difficulties. If a woman in the circle of women was critical of others and complaining then her companions would listen to her and offer whatever advice they had. If she continued to complain upon their next gathering she would be encouraged to follow the advice previously given. If she still continued to complain about others the group would simply get up and move a short distance to another location. The complaining woman could rejoin the group if she came and participated in silence for a time. Usually this was enough and her full participation was restored.

And, closer to home, another example. You may remember the event, a few years ago, in the public gallery of the Federal Parliament in Canberra when, after the Prime Minister of the day had refused yet again to say sorry to the stolen generation, men and women, indigenous and non-indigenous, stood up and silently turned their backs to the Prime Minister. A powerful and non-violent way of indicating a judgement that wrong had been done and yet a preparedness to stay in relationship. A way of drawing attention to failure whilst still expressing hope for reconciliation.

Wise fathers, and mothers, friends, neighbours, priests and parishioners, nation states, need from time to time to find ways of expressing concern, fear, even judgement, whilst still staying in relationship. As Paul reminds the church in Rome and us – loving our neighbour is the fulfilling of the law.

So where are the ties that bind in unhelpful ways in your family or workplace, in our church life or in our local community, or indeed between nations? What can we do to loose what binds? And where are those persons and things that are loose and without connection that need to be bound by love, commitment, expectation, relationship?

We need to develop relationships in our families, our church, our community in which we feel comfortable enough to raise concerns and differences and perceptions of wrong doing. Then we can talk, listen, look and reconsider and we can clear up misunderstanding and work toward reconciling differences. Let us grow as a community of love – love that is robust, faithful and redemptive. And if we can be this way with each other then we will have something of great value to share with others, we can be a light in a sometimes dark world.

Even so, come Lord Jesus Christ.