

# RECONCILIATION: TO REPAIR WITH GOD

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*"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." 2 Corinthians 5:17-18*

**IN JAPAN**, there is an art called *kintsukuroi*. It means to **repair with gold**. Broken pottery is put back together using gold or silver lacquer to fill in the cracks. This restored piece of pottery is considered to be even more beautiful and valuable for having been broken.

Last year, at a Place for Hope training event, I was introduced to this remarkable concept, a powerful analogy for the rich and transforming possibilities reconciliation can bring into our lives when we are open to being 'repaired with God'. But before we explore what reconciliation looks like, let us take a brief look at the dynamic of conflict.

## **Conflict: danger or opportunity?**

Conflict is an integral part of all healthy living systems: it can be a catalyst for growth and create an energy that can be life-giving. Conflict, like suffering, is also an inevitable part of human existence. However, it is the way in which we face them that defines us. Are we able to see the healing potential in brokenness and embrace it with hope? Or do we prefer to avoid conflict and hope it will go away?

In Chinese, the word **conflict** (or crisis) is made up of two characters: *danger* and *opportunity*. When we move through conflict, we have choices: we can either react to conflict

with fear and blame, transferring our anger and pain on to others; or we can use conflict as an opportunity to understand ourselves and others more deeply and become open to being changed or transformed in the process.

Change... perhaps easy for some, but it tends to be rather more challenging for most of us! And yet, for Christians, the Greek word *metanoia* conveys the essence of Jesus' teaching: to be changed! To be willing to be changed in our hearts and in our minds, as well as in how we live our lives in relationship with others.

## **Reconciliation: open to being changed**

To seek reconciliation assumes that we have somehow experienced brokenness or sorrow: in our relationship with God, within ourselves, or in our relationships with others. But to seek to be a reconciling presence in our churches, our communities and our world assumes that we have already opened

ourselves -- with humility, vulnerability and courage -- to be changed; to be reconciled within ourselves; to be 'repaired with God.'

Dr Cecelia Clegg, a former lecturer at New College Edinburgh University, defines personal reconciliation as:

*"...a system of attitudes, actions and disciplines, necessary to bring all the dimensions of a human person into positive and life-giving relationship with God and with one another."*

These include developing self-awareness; moving towards forgiving ourselves; being open to being made new; and finding our way towards forgiveness of others.

## **Reconciliation as a journey, an encounter and a place**

John Paul Lederach is one of the most respected peacebuilders across the world today. He has devoted his life to walking alongside people in conflict. In *'The Journey Toward Reconciliation'* he describes reconciliation as a journey, as encounter and as a place.



Kintsukuroi pottery



危機

Danger Opportunity

Chinese: Conflict (or crisis)

聽

Ears

Eyes

Undivided  
Attention

Heart

Chinese: To listen

- as a **journey**: where there might have been *flight away from* each other, it then becomes the *daring trip back*. Walking with humility and vulnerability, it is a journey *toward and through the conflict*, bringing God's love into the world through who we are and how we walk.
- as **encounter**: the journey through conflict toward reconciliation involves turning inward to *face oneself and one's own fears and anxieties*; but it also means turning toward and seeking the face of the *other*, seeing within this face the common humanity which we all share, and allowing each other's pain to change us.
- as a **place**: the *meeting place* – where we encounter others and ourselves. To enter into this space where transformation might take place requires us to be courageous, vulnerable and trusting as well as willing to be changed, to forgive, and be forgiven. It is a space which encourages us to be fully present to those who are different, and those with whom we might disagree.

*"Reconciliation needs to come from within ourselves first, before you can ever begin to be reconciled with others. Sometimes this is a very long process, and different people take less or more time to come to this place. But in the end, it is the only way."*

These are the words of Shireen, a young Palestinian woman whom I met several years ago in Jerusalem. She was involved in *The Parents Circle – Families Forum: Israeli Palestinian Bereaved Families for Peace* and

organisation bringing together Israeli and Palestinian families, each of whom had had a loved one die violently as a result of the ongoing conflict and Occupation. Their shared grief enabled them to listen to each others' stories of pain and anger. By listening, they could recognise the common humanity in each other as well as the futility of violent conflict. For many, this enabled enough of a change of heart and mind to empower them to go together, in pairs, to tell their stories to others. Their hope was that other hearts and minds would also be opened to seeing 'the other' as a human being rather than an enemy, and that eventually personal and community reconciliation might be possible.

#### Listening graciously

Listening to each others' stories... it seems so simple! However, often we do not know the story of the person sitting close to us in church: we don't know the essence of the person, who they really are, or what 'gives them life'. How often do we identify the people in church by what they believe, or the role that they play? Or judge them by our expectations of them? How often is it that it takes someone's death before we hear about the depth and breadth of their life?

If only we placed as much emphasis on 'right relationships' in our churches as we do on what we consider to be 'right beliefs'. Our shared stories are what give meaning to our relationships. If we are used to listening deeply and graciously to each other, when differences arise they are so much easier to address. Deep listening is a skill, and once again, the Chinese provide us with

some clues as to how to do this.

The verb 'to listen' is made up of the characters for four Chinese words: ears, eyes, heart and undivided attention.

But listening graciously to others with whom we are in conflict is not easy. We find it difficult to hear each other through the noise of our own needs. Sometimes, it is helpful to have someone who is not directly involved in the conflict facilitate a conversation enabling us to listen to each other more deeply than we might otherwise be able to do on our own.

Mediators and facilitators are trained to help individuals and groups have difficult conversations with the hope that impaired relationships might also be healed in the process. We see these skills being used in family mediation, community/neighbour mediation, workplace mediation, teacher/parent mediation and commercial mediation.

What about our faith communities? Historically, the Quakers and Mennonites have been the groups most actively involved in providing hope to conflicted individuals and congregations through mediation and conflict reconciliation. But today, there are a growing number of organisations focused on faith-based peacebuilding: Place for Hope, The Corrymeela Community, Bridge Builders, Rose Castle, St Ethelburgas, Faith in Conflict, Centre for Good Relations, Conforti Institute.

I invite you to explore them... and to be open to being changed! ●

*Nancy Adams feels privileged to lead the newly formed ecumenical Board of Trustees for Place for Hope as a new Scottish Charity.*