

Read Archbishop Justin's article for Premier Christianity magazine about Christ's call of reconciliation to all Christians.



In 1966 for the first time since the Reformation, my predecessor Michael Ramsay officially met the Pope. After centuries of conflict and bloodshed, they set up a dialogue in doctrinal and practical issues and signed a "Common Declaration".

As they were leaving the Basilica of St Paul in Rome, the Pope drew Archbishop Ramsay aside and gave him a ring "the ring the Pope had worn as Cardinal Archbishop of Milan. This profound gesture of reconciliation brought Archbishop Ramsay to tears."

I wore the same ring in April 2019 when, along with Pope Francis and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, I hosted a retreat at the Vatican for the warring leaders of South Sudan, a sign of how far the two churches had come in living together and loving one another and how reconciliation enabled us to make God's desire for peace known in one of the world's most battle-scarred nations. "

Those remarkable days reminded me of Jesus' last public prayer in John 17:21 "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." This oneness "is the calling of each Christian. It shows the world that Jesus Christ is Lord and gives integrity to our mission of reconciliation."

In a world marred by war, violence, conflict and strife, reconciliation promises renewal, new beginnings, new life, and new relationships "with each other and with God."

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, war elsewhere around the world, the global cost of living and food crisis, climate change, and new technologies that have the power to both build and destroy beyond anything we are currently capable of, will in the next thirty years put greater pressure on how we live with one another "geopolitically, economically, and culturally."

What is our calling in a world we are tearing apart to keep pieces for ourselves? How is God calling us to join His work of putting the shattered pieces back together - to be reconciled to our planet, one another, ourselves, and Him? " " "

Christians must be one family. That does not mean we all have to be the same; The Anglican Communion alone contains a multitude of differences. How we handle those differences makes us known as the Church of God and Jesus as the world's redeemer.

In this era of rapid technological development, smartphones and social media sites connect us with people around the world. We see diversity at an unprecedented level. In the 19th century, the divisions within the Anglican Communion and between different Christian denominations were as complicated then as now, but they took months to be communicated. Now we witness conflict and tension in real time. The danger is that we become communicators but not community-makers. Community takes time, commitment, and trust. Â

I once worked with a Muslim community and a Christian community that had been involved in riots in which many people were killed. A Christian pastor, after lengthy heart-searching, led his people to seek engagement with the Muslim community. They started buying bread from the Muslim baker.Â When the baker found his business taking off with Christian customers, the local Imam visited the pastor to find out what was happening. The pastor explained, and responding to the Imam's offer of help, requested that elders from the mosque spend time on Sunday around the church, as Muslim youths were throwing petrol bombs at it. The Imam agreed and asked the Christians do the same to stop Christian youth from throwing petrol bombs into the mosque in their times of prayer.Â

Over the next 18 months, dialogue developed until they were working together for the common good, digging a sewage system in the area. Although still arguing ferociously, their spades, picks and shovels were used not as weapons but to improve their shared environment. They built the trust that enabled them to live together as a community.Â

Because we are human, we will inevitably disagree and must learn to disagree well. Disagreeing well means looking outwards and responding to the crises around us with the love of God within us to reach unity.Â Â

In a world where individualism and atomisation are admired, difference is often interpreted as a threat. Disagreement is a challenge to our identity because we have often created God in our own image. As Voltaire said: "In the beginning God created man in His own image, and man has been trying to repay the favour ever since."Â Â

The image of God is seen in every tribe and tongue. We must not try and put human limits on the divine and limitless God. The Church must embrace its profound and wonderful diversity to find unity. Â 2 Corinthians 5:20 reads: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors," as though God were making his appeal through us." We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."Â Â Reconciliation is a matter of mission. People will not know God's Church unless it looks more like God-loving, sacrificial and reconciling.Â Â

One wonderful example of this is the Community of St Anselm at Lambeth Palace. Young Christians from different countries, traditions and denominations come and live together for a year in prayer and service. It is a place where reconciliation becomes real in daily life, where problems small and large are resolved in community and with love. It isn't always easy, but it leads people from different backgrounds and perspectives to find they are all loved equally by the one Triune God.Â Â

The difficulty of reconciliation is something Christians must face. In John 16:12 there is a word which means to carry, or to bear: "bastazein". The same word is used in Isaiah 53 for bearing sins. The cost of reconciling is to bear pain, loss, and suffering. That is the place of a church that looks like Jesus: sacrificial and serving.Â Â

One night in 1940, during the Second World War, Coventry Cathedral was bombed. In the aftermath, amid the destruction, smoke and horror, Provost Richard Howard had the words "Father Forgive" inscribed on the wall behind the Altar.Â Â

On Christmas Day that same year, Provost Howard preached at the 10 o'clock BBC service. He said after the war they would rebuild "a more Christ-Child-like world". Thousands of nails strewn over the floor of the Cathedral were turned into crosses "one of which I wear today. This is what reconciliation looks like, away from revenge and towards God's healing and hope.Â Â

The commands of Christ from John's gospel tell us to wash feet and love one another. Service and love.Â What do they look like in reconciliation as we navigate the complexities of our lives?Â

A team working at Lambeth Palace have developed a course called the Difference Course. Through five sessions, participants develop three habits which, when practised, are transformational.Â Â

The first is to be curious. Not circling the wagons or being defensive, but truly being open to others, to hearing their stories and understanding their perspectives. This curiosity calls us to look beyond ourselves, to challenge preconceptions, to look at others through God's eyes rather than our own.Â

The second habit is to be present.Â This means encountering others with authenticity, giving them our full attention - even when we disagree or find them difficult. It means having the humility to recognise our own fears and flaws, and trust in God's grace to work through them. It means having God's strength to uphold a conviction with love. In the face of conflict and unhealthy power imbalances, it means being present to a broken reality and not naively perpetuating abuse.Â

The third habit is to reimagine. Reconciliation requires the moral imagination to hope for something different, even after generations of the same cycles of violence. It means not seeking to prevail, but to seeing something brand new, which is the work of the trinitarian God.Â

What we see in the gospels is Jesus' reconciliation to those we consider to be "outside" as well as inside: to the younger son as well as the elder in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, to the disciples as well as the Syrophenician woman, to the woman at the well accused of adultery and Zaccheus, the tax collector. Â

Jesus reaches beyond boundaries, gathering us as part of a new people with a new identity. He calls us to dare to imagine how things might look, who we might be together, without the limitations we impose on ourselves.

The capacity, the willingness, and the ability to work together in a world torn apart by war and want, points to the Prince of Peace. The promise of reconciliation points towards hope, even in the shadow of the Cross. "Blessed are the peacemakers" reads Matthew 5:9, "for they will be called children of God."

I pray each of you, beloved children of God, might live your calling to be a seeker and a speaker of peace. Whether within your own heart, in your family, at work, with fellow Christians, between nations, or on our hurting planet, may you play your part of God's work that the entire world might know the reality of Jesus Christ.

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