



Read Archbishop Justin's lecture exploring the meaning of reconciliation. The Archbishop's lecture was the first in a series of 7 running from September to November. The series is called "Here I Stand, I can do no other". These are the words of Martin Luther during the reformation in 1521.

Here I Stand, I Can Do No Other: Reconciliation

Thank you for inviting me to speak this evening at the St. Martin in the Fields autumn lecture series. And what an amazing series it is! If you look through the programme and brochure that you've been given, you will see that it gets better and better. It starts at the bottom and works up! So make the most of it. It's fitting that I should be in this particular church to talk about reconciliation, because this church is a byword for witness in the public square. It's a byword from decades before the Church of England as a whole began to escape from its sense that its duty was to approve of whatever was being done in the public square. And it's had an extraordinary series of remarkable theologians and prophetic vicars here in this church.

This evening, I've been invited to speak, and I'm delighted to have the opportunity, to talk of reconciliation in the context of the Middle East. I'm delighted particularly that this lecture is in partnership with Embrace the Middle East, a charity that, as you heard, works with and alongside Christian partners in the region, to support vulnerable and marginalised communities in some of the most challenging contexts on the face of the planet. It's a mission of faithful and loving service that has been going for 170 years. And it is as important today as when it responded to the Armenian genocides.

And I take on the theme of this lecture with some trepidation.

Yes, the region is complex and fraught with sensitivities that reflect decades-long problems such as civil war, occupation, political violence, foreign military intervention, youth unemployment, gender inequality, limited social protection, and very widespread human vulnerability owing to poverty and unmet basic needs. That's not even a remotely adequate list of the trials of this region. And, as we look forward, and particularly at this moment. And I have been listening carefully to Jewish friends, as well, as they look forward, both here and in the region. They would say that, going forward, it looks equally challenging as governments and societies come to terms with populism, with changes in political character, and with the overall existential threat of a changing climate.

And, more importantly, the real reason for trepidation, the deep reason and for all of us to feel a certain amount of disquiet is we're here and not there. And with a very few exceptions, including Daniel and his Eminence, Archbishop Angaelos, sitting here. With a very few exceptions, we are here because this is where we are. We're not there. Theirs is not our home. It's not our base. It's not where we find our life and our roots. I am speaking as a white, British, Archbishop of Canterbury. Of course, that means I have a certain responsibility. As I share the stories that I'm hearing from Christians in the region. To some extent, I want to facilitate a bit of, sort of, political speed-dating that we might all hear and know more

about the church in the region that is so vital for the global church. I'll come back to that. But I'm extremely conscious that there do not exist readymade solutions from this vantage point or any other outside the region. And my task this evening is going to be a chance to share something of my heart and the hope that I see in the church in the Middle East. And it's for that reason, at the risk of distorting Martin Luther, who gave the title to this series, 'Here I Stand, I Can Do No Other.'.

Let me begin by unpacking a bit about what I mean by reconciliation. It's a word that is at the very heart of the gospel. It is the gospel, to quote Sam at a lecture in Coventry in 2013, it is the good news of Jesus Christ. God in Christ is in the business of putting people right with himself. From that beautiful picture of God walking in the cool of the day, in a garden paradise, to corruption, death, and exclusion. We are brought into renewed relationship. God's very Spirit in- dwelling us through our adoption as fellow heirs, children of God.

But we know that this is only a tiny part of the story. The in-dwelling of God's Spirit is in this new family, the church, one of the most argumentative and occasionally frustrating bodies that exist anywhere in the world. I remember on a particularly bad day, I had a meeting with the then Prime Minister. This was only recently, so it was about nine Prime Ministers ago! And I had a meeting with the Prime Minister, and he said, "What are you doing over the next few days?" Just friendly chat? I said, "I'm going to the General Synod of the Church of England." And he said, "Oh, what's that, like?" I've used the expression before with other parties but as he was a Conservative Prime Minister, I used it for the Conservatives. I said, "It's a bit like a Conservative Party conference only without the same sense of mutual affection!" They're lovely people, except you put Anglicans all in the same room and heat the room up, as we usually do. And for some strange reason, they become complicated.

But we live in the church. This is what The Times did not understand last week in its leading article, at the end of endless statistics being published. We are in the family of the church. We can't simply say, "Oh, well, I'm not going to be in that bit of family." God calls us to be the family.

That is part of reconciliation. Its salvation is not an individualistic lifestyle choice. It's a call to radical new community. And radicalism always leads to rage, at some point, and then through that, to reconciliation.

In our habit of the Eucharist, we enact, we make concrete, we realise this good news as a reconciled community. Whether we're male or female, rich or poor, from every nation and ethnicity, straight or queer, we are bought together around the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Which is why I said what I said in 2016, nothing can change that. It is impossible to overrule what God is doing there. The good news of reconciliation brings together God and human beings, and it brings together our broken humanity, those bits of us that we hate, despise, fear. Those bits of us that erupt into the most terrible, terrible places and wars and cruelties because we're human. And God is in the middle of that.

So going back to those picture-stories in the early part of Genesis, humanity has moved from a garden-Paradise to deathly travail, and very quickly to the murder of Abel by Cain. Enmity even within families, sometimes the bitterest of all enmities, characterises our existence. It is our

constant struggle. Most of us will have people who we would really like to say what we thought about them, but we know it wouldn't really be healthy.

In the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the incarnation, the passion, the ascension, we are baptised into a new family as the Holy Spirit fills us, forgiven and forgiving. United across all human difference. But the story doesn't stop there.

The resurrection of Christ is the resurrection life of the church but it also heralds a new creation. Colossians 1:15-23, which I've been dwelling on for many long months now, speaks of God, reconciling all things, everything created to himself through Jesus, not just people, not even people and the earth, because the greatest undeclared war in all history is raging, and has been raging: our war against the creation. That is the war that is killing more and will cause more subsidiary wars than we can imagine.

But in Colossians it says God is at work in the midst of all this. In other words, there is a difference made to the stuff of life, to the whole cosmos, the new heaven and the new earth that are coming our way blessed with life and hope. Our rivers, oceans, icecaps, soil, our solar system, the galaxy, the very universe itself. Everything is reconciled to its creator, through Jesus Christ.

As John Updike, an Episcopalian Christian who knew a few things about bodies, wrote in a wonderful Easter poem (I'm not going to quote those bits) he wrote this,

“The stone is rolled back, not papier mâché,

Not a stone in a story,

But the vast rock of materiality, that in the slow grinding of

Time, will eclipse for each of us

The wide light of day.”

Jesus Christ reconciles us to God, to each other, to creation, to the cosmos.

And the story doesn't even stop there. Our calling isn't to bask in the self-reflective gaze of these truths. We are called to be agents of this reconciliation, to live it. We are called to be reconcilers, that tell the good news that people may be brought into full relationship with God, and that death is defeated.

My mother died in mid-July, it was all over the press. She was the last survivor of Churchill's personal staff. For all kinds of complicated reasons I won't go into, we had the funeral yesterday and the cremation this morning. And you obviously have all kinds of mixed feelings. She was 93 when

she was told she was dying: had terminal cancer. She said, “I thought it was that. I'm 93 I've had a wonderful life. And I'm a very lucky old lady.”

Well, that was a good expression of faith. And her last words I heard her say clearly were, “I shall see God.”

But death is a great liar. And even given that, at the moment of her death, the family were around her, I had my hand on her head praying for her as she drew her last breath. Even given that, when I saw the coffin in the crematorium this morning, it said to me, “Life after death? You're kidding? You can't be seriously believing that?” And then the person who was leading the service, actually our second son who got ordained in June, who was leading the committal service, as he read the service, it talked of judgement and it talked of new life.

That is reconciliation. And I began to remember why we are those who don't grieve as others do, as Paul says to the Thessalonians, without hope. We are called to be reconcilers, the ambassadors of reconciliation for people with God and for people with eternal life into which we are called. That is the greatest message we have, of a church community. We are called to be reconcilers of a church community that heralds a new humanity that is multi-coloured, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, gathering around the gifts of God.

And so I can joke and make slightly cynical jokes about the General Synod. But actually, I love them. And I know what they can be, and will be, and at their best what they are. And every time we have awful debates, as we do from time to time, every time, a few days later, something else happens, and I see some of the beauty of what goes on there. And that's God at work.

Ours is a ministry of reconciliation.

So far, so good. But what's that mean? For those outside the church? Don't worry, I'm not going to ignore the elephant in the room. We all know about the conflict in the church, and just going to stop talking about it. What that conflict reminds us is that in this ministry of reconciliation, as Paul goes on to say, we're working with God, we're his fellow workers, his ambassadors, his fellow workers.

Like our efforts at living a holy life, (and if anyone here succeeds in that, wander off and have a drink in a pub, well, that won't be very holy! Wander off and pray, because I doubt I'll tell you anything you don't know already if you're living a perfectly holy life already). But like those who try, we say, I know we get this wrong so often. But know, I know that I found goodness and truth in Jesus Christ. It's all been gift. It's all to do with God in Christ. Do you want to join with us at working for this? Whether you're a Christian or not? Shall we partner together in seeing what we can do in this broken, horrendous, tragic world?

The thing about the good news of Jesus Christ is it sort of erupts all over the place. It's messy. It starts to change things dramatically. It's not a private hobby for a little bit of Sunday morning, when we get real with God, and that's why we worship on Sunday morning, among other things. Our reconciliation bubbles out into the workplaces and relationships, the environment, our politics and, yes, to conflicts and disputes in the church or not.

So what does that mean this hot evening, about reconciliation in the Middle East church? The first thing to assert about the Christians in the Middle East before we go any further is that, as we all know, they're not newcomers. Many years ago I'm glad to say but it still makes me twitch with embarrassment, I said to a Palestinian Christian friend of mine in northern Israel. "So how long have your family been Christians?" I still can't say it without wincing and he said, "Well, I suppose since the time of St. Paul or thereabouts."

We speak of the church in this region, we are acknowledging the first flowering, the very home, the root of, of the Christian faith, not some transplanted strange community from the West that doesn't belong there: not something that has to be indigenised. My wonderful predecessor Rowan Williams notes this quote,

"For two millennia the Christian presence in the Middle East has been an integral part of successive civilisations – a dominant presence in the Byzantine era, a culturally very active partner in the early Muslim centuries, a patient and long-suffering element, like the historic Jewish communities of the Maghreb and the Middle East, in the complex mosaic of ethnic jurisdictions within the Ottoman Empire and, more recently, a political catalyst and nursery of radical thinking in the dawn of Arab nationalism."

This is seen most obviously in Eastern Christians. And there is a division that's now lasted more or less 1000 years and we need, as John Paul II said, to "breathe with both lungs", east and west, in our lives as Christians. (Such a privilege to have Archbishop Angaelos with us.) We have to testify to the witness to us of the Eastern churches, as well as to us of the Western churches. They're not different things. They are sisters and brothers in Christ. And that is so often forgotten, not so much in what we say, but in how many people think about the Middle East. Their astonishment when they find a Palestinian Christian, because they assumed they were all Muslim.

As the sketch of the historic presence of Christians in the middle east from Rowan Williams has hinted, it's not just the global church that benefits from the gifts of Eastern Christians: the other lung with which we need to breathe fully. Christians in the Middle East have and continue to be a vital part of the region, where their life in Christ spills out to bless neighbours of other faiths in all sorts of ways. If you want to see authentic, interfaith action and dialogue, go and watch what Eastern Christians do. They've been practicing for roughly 13/14 thousand years, and they're really rather better at it than we are.

We could go into great depth about the challenges facing the Christian population 20% of the whole population in the Middle East 100 years ago, 4% today (about 15 million people). It's been worse in some countries than others. Israel bucks the trend for an overall growth in numbers of Christians. But the historic Palestinian Christian communities in and around Jerusalem in the occupied territories, are feeling pressures that put their future viability in real jeopardy. And we cannot ignore, and to their immense credit most Jewish people in this country will not ignore, refuse to ignore, the fact that things are said by ministers in the government in Israel, that the Jewish people in this country find horrendous. And they're not afraid to say so. I so admire that courage, with the history we have.

In Iraq, Syria, numbers have been devastated. Yet we need to be brought face to face with this reality in order to name the sins of persecution, and for us in the West, for our sins of neglect and complicity. But also, we can't see Christians in the region as a people that are done to but we must see them as active citizens in their own communities. They do the most extraordinary things. They're a blessing to those around them. And they set a pattern that enables people of different religious traditions, to be inspired to live together well. And for this reason then I want to share some of the ways in which church communities are punching above their weight. Despite evident pressures of different kinds.

In Egypt, I've been privileged to see how over the years, Archbishop Mounir, the Anglican Archbishop and now Archbishop Samy have both led a tiny Christian denomination, punching well above their weight in dialogue with Muslims at al-Azhar University, and in a close and wonderful partnership and protection often from the Coptic Church going back forever. They've developed the programs for Christian and Muslim young people to clear litter together, or arts programs at the Arkan Centre in St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria. In Cairo, at the Cathedral, you'll see a compound catering to refugees from all sorts of religious backgrounds and all parts of Africa and the Middle East.

The Coptic Orthodox Church's public outreach organization, BLESS, runs community development activities in over 50 communities (probably well over 50 but we're safe to say over 50). They serve practical needs, build interfaith relations. This is simply the reconciling work of Christ. Doing reconciliation day to day. In Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territories, my thoughts often turn to the tent of nations project, and the remarkable figure of Daoud Nassar.

I'll never forget the spirit of Christ that I witnessed in him when visiting his family farm outside Bethlehem in 2017. On a rather barren hillside, squeezed as so many Palestinian Christians are by those who'd be happy to see them go from their historic land, Daoud's response is to pray for those who would tear down his olive trees or beat him up, to witness the forgiving love of Christ whilst seeking justice, neither we can overrun, nor full of bitterness and hatred. Instead of seeds of bitterness, his farm has become a beacon of pilgrimage and reconciliation to the world.

Responding here this evening, we have Daniel Munayer of Musalaha: the word in Arabic for reconciliation. It's an organisation devoted to reconciliation with enormous courage. And anything involving reconciliation involves two key things.

And this is where it does get rather sensitive.

The first is listening, when what you want to do is shout. That is the most extraordinary thing. Because when you're being abused, what you want to do is abuse back. When you're being attacked, you want to attack back. Listening is particularly hard work when hope is in short supply. "I can do something now. And I have few hopes that much will change in the future," is what the heart says to the mind. And the second is the issue of sacrifice.

I wrote a rather ... ah no, I won't say that! I was going to say a rather bad book. I wrote a sort of book about a year or two ago on reconciliation:

Power of Reconciliation. It makes a good doorstep!

One of the things I wrote (and I write and speak in order to work out what I'm thinking. I'm an external processor. It's very dangerous for Comms Teams because I suddenly get an idea as I'm going along, then you get off like that!) But as I was writing it, the question I was thinking about was "How do you start reconciliation? How do you actually get it going?" And the answer it seems to me, though Sam may well comment on this and listen to him more than me, the answer to this it seems to me is that the theological answer, the biblical pattern of the action of God is, the stronger needs to make the first move. The more powerful needs to move before the weaker. The more powerful is called to a sacrifice. And in our case, as Christians, we believe that the most powerful in the cosmos, God Himself, sacrificed His son in order that there might be reconciliation.

And when we mentioned Israel and the Palestinian churches, we cannot evade the world of politics. Daniel will rightly talk of reconciliation being contingent on justice and security: justice and security together. People need to know in a war, from 20 years of being in the middle of them, they need to know that not only is their suffering recognised, acknowledged and in whatever way they agreed, dealt with, but also that it's not going to happen again. Or at least there's a very, very good chance it will not happen again. That's why the European Iron and Steel Community was formed. It wasn't because everyone thought it'd be more fun to make iron and steel together and trade it. (It might be I don't know. I'm not an expert.) But it certainly wasn't and it became the European Union eventually.

It was, to quote a friend of mine long since died, who was the head of shipping at ELF when I was working there, an oil company (yes, I know!) in the 1980s (late 70s, early 80s) who said to me, "You don't understand it." It was then the European Economic Community. "The EEC doesn't exist for trade. It exists for justice and security, so that people never... young Frenchman and young Germans don't kill each other on the battlefields of eastern France."

My own prayer echoes that of the prayers of my brother, Archbishop Hosam in Jerusalem. I pray for a just peace and a secure peace, a two state solution, along 1965 lines with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Again, we must acknowledge that the hope of that is in short supply. I am just about (despite my normal Eeyore tendency) I am constitutionally inclined as a Christian to be hopeful. Not hopeful about myself or about other human beings, and never optimistic. They're very different things. But to be hopeful about the power and the action of God, and the faithfulness of God and the love of God, which is so cosmic, as to absorb hatred.

Of course, I'm deeply concerned about the current Israeli Government and the tensions in Israel itself. I grieve to see so many people at loggerheads in Israel: that precious country. I'm grieved to see a coalition that includes far-right racists and the erosion of some rights of Israeli

Arab citizenship. You will know the stories which get more and more, of attack and abuse of Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem and elsewhere, desecration of places of worship.

However, one of the things that gives me hope is when we find ourselves, as we so often do in the ministry of reconciliation, with partners beyond our own community of faith. It was a huge comfort when my friend, the Chief Rabbi, was one of the first to condemn the attack on the Protestant Christian cemetery in the New Year. The Board of Deputies of British Jews did similarly. We didn't have to ring them up and say, "Oi !Your turn!" They just went there, long before we had a chance to get hold of them.

Being part of God's ministry of reconciliation means looking to find partners for the common good, wherever they come from.

At least in theory, the previous status of the Supreme Court offered a guard to the constitutional rights of all citizens. And the words of President Herzog in July condemning attacks on Christians, and sharing his own efforts to restrain the alarming change at the state of the Supreme Court may not be succeeding at the moment, but I praise God that he's trying. And the Supreme Court also offers a guard to any political ambitions to extend Israeli sovereignty without rights to the occupied territories. We know of the advocacy and protests of so many Israeli Jews at the direction of travel of the government, who like Yuval Noah Harari, the prominent Jewish historian and philosopher, one of the world's leading public intellectuals, worry that these judicial reforms are changing the very DNA of Israel as a democratic Jewish state.

Further afield, we've seen the scourge of ISIS to be a catastrophe for Christians in Syria and Iraq. It's devastating for all communities, including the vastly greater number of Muslims than Christians who've been killed and continued to be killed. I think again, of St. George's Anglican Church in Baghdad, which I visited last in 2003. Its ministry in the neighbourhood serving not just Iraqi Christians, but Muslims.

This is reconciliation in action. It sees people, not labels. And again, we were surprised by who joined us as partners in the work we were doing. When ISIS held sway Shia Muslims from the al-Khoei Institute advocated for the rights and freedoms of Christians. And as an aside, even in these last few weeks, there have been powerful messages of condemnation from Muslim leaders in the UK and in Pakistan of the attacks on Christians and churches near Faisalabad.

There are many things that I could tell you about and there isn't time. I've over shot already. The Ankawa Humanitarian Committee, the Middle East Council of Churches... the point is, our reconciling God is at work in and across the Middle East, always against the odds and usually against our expectations. We are the ones who need to learn.

A Middle East without the historic presence of Christians would be a tragedy of epochal size. If Christians go from the Middle East, it is cutting the heart out of the Christian body. It would be terrible. Beyond description. Terrible. They've survived so much. And that's why charities like Embrace are so important.

Well, I've done a shameless plug alert about the bad book! The good book! Good book! First time I had to do a book launch a journalist said tome, "So why should we read this book?" And I said, "I don't know. I don't think it's very good." And he (I must learn from Sam on this because his books sell so much better than mine) and he put his hand very kindly on mine and said, "You haven't done this before have you?"

But in the book, I talk of three habits of reconciliation in the last part of the book, that the team at Lambeth Palace (not me) have developed for The Difference course: Being Curious, Being Present and Reimagining. Let us be curious about the global church and particularly about the Middle East. Let's be curious about what makes them tick. Let's listen. Let's be present. Attentive. Suffering with them in their stories of hope, resilience, forgiveness and commitment to the common good. And let us join with them in their prayers as we together allow the Holy Spirit to teach us to reimagine a world built on the righteousness and justice of God's reconciling love: a righteousness and justice, which is undefeated by all the powers of evil and will have the last word.

Autumn Lecture Series 2023 – Here I Stand, I Can Do No Other

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