

Wouldn't be saying anything new if I said that the world seems a bit crazy right now.

And that is even without considering the ravages and strictures imposed on us by COVID-19.

It seems that what we thought was right and wrong is being challenged as well as what we believe is good as opposed to what we believe is evil.

I never thought I would see the day that the most powerful man in the world would declare that some of the neo Nazis and white supremacists at a rally in Charlottesville Virginia were very fine people, even as they shouted slogans of hate towards Jews and blacks .or that respected leaders in science and medicine would be openly ridiculed by people fuelled by prejudice rather than knowledge or that the leaders of the American Military would be accused of waging wars to feather their own nests

I watched with disgust a you tube video of a young white woman with a deep southern accent rail against liberals who prefer Muslims Latinos and homosexuals over good right thinking bible believing American Christians

However a cursory search of Facebook in this country during this election season will show that similar bigotry and hatred is not far from the surface, in fact because of the all pervading presence of social media it is right at the surface of our society.

But you know, people aren't born hating. Our children have to be taught to hate.

Sure when I was a kid we used to run around with imaginary guns shooting each other, we'd even play Cowboys and Injuns, and have fights with wooden swords, but we didn't hate our make believe enemies – -they were our mates, just enjoyed the rough and tumble and had no concept of vindictively causing and suffering and death. And even though our make believe games have been replaced by realistic videos the attitude of our kids is competition and excitement, not personalised malice and hatred.

However, no one is immune from learning hatred and it starts early

A child doesn't understand why they should hate someone because they are a Muslim or a Jew or a Christian or a gang member or has dark skin or has white skin, but a child quickly learns that some people are not us, and are dangerous to all that is good, because the ones he or she loves have told them so, maybe not with words, but by attitude and example.

This same path to hate can be followed at any age. Teens with no hope of a future can readily be shown how to channel their hopelessness into hate. Grown men and women, too, can channel frustrations and fear into hatred.

This hatred has brought so much pain and suffering into the world for just so long. World history is packed to the brim with acts of evil that have their origin in the perception that some people who are not like us are bad or subhuman.

Even within living memory some horrific events stand out.

It was with very heavy hearts that Lorrie and I stood in one of the killing fields active in the mid 1970s in Cambodia and saw bones and rags of clothing that had been exposed by floods as well as the huge memorial filled with the skulls of murdered victims.

Many of us remember, too the wholesale slaughter during Stalin's iron-fisted reign over Russia, and the genocide Rwanda. We have learned that once we are taught to demonize those we hate, then any act can be justified.

In the death camps of Nazi Germany, we discovered that people who had been raised on the prose of Goethe, the breathtakingly beautiful music of Bach, and Beethoven could yet use the finest tools of human understanding in the attempt to systematically wipe out a people.

More recently we saw that the hatred of the west instilled by the likes of Osama Bin Laden could result in men, so consumed by that hate, that they gave into a desire to lash out against the United States in an act of terror that became more important to them than their own lives. After the horrible events surrounding the twin towers attack 19 years ago last week America was so wounded and filled with fear and hatred that they unleashed years of almost senseless retribution against those they perceived as evil and the world was made to look on and sometimes participate in at great cost, as the USA fought back. Osama Bin Laden, the man behind the terror was finally killed Yet none of these actions has brought healing to America or the world

The surface maybe scarred over, but the pain remains bursting out again recently in the re-emergence of race based violence in America and xenophobia in other parts of the world

But shouldn't life be like it was in the Bible?

After all we just heard probably one of the most well known stories from the OT

From Exodus, we get the story of the Children of Israel at the Red Sea. God drives back the water, the people cross on dry land and then Pharaoh and his pursuing army is drowned. The Lord has triumphed gloriously, the horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

This wrath of God seems appropriate. Good destroys evil.

But that is not what followed the events of Sept 11th, for the Christian and the Muslim world God's judgement still hangs in the balance.

This morning However, coupled with this reading about God triumphing over evil and destroying bad people, there is a parable from Jesus all about grace and forgiveness

Jesus tells of a man who is not simply in debt; he faces an impossibly large mountain of money to repay. One Biblical scholar, has calculated that as King Herod's annual income from all taxes from all his territories was a mere 900 talents per year, the 10,000 talents would exceed all of the taxes of Syria, Phoenicia, Judea, and Samaria as well.

The parable is an impossible exaggeration; no servant could amass a debt so large. Then, when the king cancels the debt, the man, now free from the burden, goes out to demand payment from someone who owes him a debt equal to a hundred days' wages.

The first debt was so great as to be impossible either to owe or to pay. That is, until we realize that in the parable, it is we who are the debtors. We owe a debt to God that we cannot possibly repay. God has not only given us life, but continues to love us and want what is best for us when our every action falls short of the glory of God.

Human evil has mounted up higher and higher over the centuries until there could be no way we could begin to atone to our righteous God for it. And yet through our faith in Jesus, we can repent, turn away from sin, and find the debt has been cancelled. But then, like the merciless servant, off

we go expecting everyone else to pay up for the hurts they have caused us. Jesus' point is embarrassingly well made. God has forgiven each of us so much that we should go out of our way to forgive others.

But Surely some human evil is just so great, so horrendous that it seems impossible to forgive

Look at those horrific events I mentioned a moment ago these surely fit into that category

Could we realistically expect a Jew to forgive Adolph Hitler or indeed any Nazi.?

Could a Cambodian teacher be expected to forgive the Khmer Rouge. ?

If a member of your family had died in the twin towers could you feel that you even have the right to forgive the followers of Bin Laden.?

The answer from scripture is pretty stark and unequivocal

First, scripture teaches that judgment is for God alone. Second, we are to forgive as we have been forgiven.

In the reading from Romans we have just heard Paul says, "Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God."

We are, each of us accountable for our actions before God. We are not accountable for the injury done to us, but for our reaction to that hurt. We are then accountable for the actions we do in reaction to the pain we have suffered

Jesus, who taught us to pray "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," called out from the cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

Yet, forgiveness can be so difficult. This is true at the global scale when we reel at the horrible acts perpetrated by terrorists, but it is just as hard surely to forgive a parent who has wilfully abused his or her child, a business partner who stole money, and too many other private tragedies that we could name.

Yet, not forgiving, means holding on to the hate. Not forgiving someone is like drinking poison in the hope that the other person will die.

This does not speak to how a nation should react when attacked by another nation or by terrorists. But it does speak about how we might react to the very personal hurts and betrayals that we have suffered.

Must we let hurt fester until it poisons us with hate? Or is it possible for us to pray for the grace that will allow us to forgive?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu certainly knows about forgiveness through his daring act of helping lead South Africa through truth and reconciliation after the end of Apartheid.

This involved thousands of acts of confession and forgiveness. He has written of this process saying, "Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what happened seriously and not minimizing it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence. It involves trying to understand the perpetrators and so have empathy, to try to stand in their shoes and appreciate the sort of pressures and influences that might have conditioned them."

Forgiveness does not have to mean forgetting, and reconciliation is not always possible.

Forgiveness means trusting judgment to God, and this is only possible by the grace that comes from God alone. Archbishop Tutu writes, "Forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim."

God became one of us in Jesus of Nazareth. He lived among us, not just teaching about love, but more importantly, showing us the love of God.

Jesus chose to show power through his powerlessness on the cross. Jesus continually gave the example of turning the other cheek, of offering mercy, love, and forgiveness. God came in Jesus and through his horrible death and wonderful resurrection demonstrated once and for all that evil cannot finally overcome and succeed. He also gave us a pattern for how humans can live godly lives.

Jesus' example was incredibly powerful, as men and women do not naturally let go of past hurts.

We have to learn grace and forgiveness. Children do not learn to forgive unless they are shown by example.

I began by saying that children have to be taught to hate it

It is also true that children have to be taught to love

AMEN