

Reconciling with the 'Other'

When we are still and quiet, inside and outside, God may explain to us how our work of reconciliation could proceed. Or reconciliation might begin when we make space in our minds and hearts, and take the time to quietly and humbly sit beside the 'other', (in reality or in our imagination) open to carefully listening to his or her voice. What is really behind or underneath the hateful words and harmful actions that have wrecked a relationship and wounded a community 'family'? Can God's love embrace and heal it?

When it is difficult to feel loving and caring towards the stranger or the 'other', who has hurt us deeply and even hates us, a possibility might be to see the 'other' as someone in need or with a problem we can help to solve. Perhaps together we can even assist an 'other' in need?

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29-37, exactly who is the 'neighbour' or 'other' is confused. We are told to not only show care and compassion towards the 'other', but also, as an 'other', to accept help from the neighbour we reject. In such mutual serving relationships, negative feelings towards the 'other', the stranger, our neighbour, a human being and God's loved child like us, may diminish and change.

We are all damaged and hurt. But can our wounds, in Christ, become shared healing wounds that have the power to painfully and slowly, one day, bring us and others to experience new life?

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"God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ,...has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18 NRSV)

All seems peaceful with these two Silkies,...but is it? The larger hen in the foreground has her eyes shut. She sits by the feeder and intends to stay there! The 'other' glares at her but feels unable to change the situation. *(My interpretation!)*

To live as a member of a loving family is usually seen as desirable, and its interactive social life an aid to personal growth. There are many families with which we might identify.

First, it would be our biological family or the one we were moved into at an early age. Later in life we may have experienced another family when we married, had a partner, brought up children, or chose to live in a community. Then there are other 'family' groups of which we may be members. These groups or communities include those associated with our work, hobbies, interests and religious faith.

Christians are baptised members of the church and may be active members of a local church family who worship together. Most of us also belong to the country we live in, being citizens by birth or naturalisation. Further, as human beings, we are all part of the global community and God's created family.

Belonging to various 'families', and the relationships it involves, can be exciting and stimulating. But we all know that living well together in any group is not easy. However much we might love others in our 'families', there are inevitable conflicts and misunderstandings resulting in wounds inflicted and people being hurt.

Where is all this going, you might ask? Paul has reminded us in 2 Corinthians 5:18, that God has given Christians, that is *us*, the ministry of reconciliation. We, as members of Christ's body today, have an on-going and often messy task, working towards mending broken relationships by revealing God's love in our words and actions. But how can we heal the divisions between us and 'others' in our families, in the workplace, in the church, in society and in the world generally?

If we turn to Matthew 5:21-24, and especially verse 23, for guidance as to how to behave when we are angry with our brother or sister, it seems that it is not enough to forgive the

'other', forget them, and be at peace in ourselves. We cannot just shrug our shoulders and tell ourselves that it is now his or her problem. Such a decision may keep us from worrying or blaming ourselves, but it does not heal what has happened. The family or community to which we both belong has been fractured. All involved, including God, suffer. It matters to us, the 'other', the community as a whole and God, that the 'other' has something against us.

Instead of 'forgetting' the person with whom we have fallen out, perhaps we can 'remember' how we felt in the past when we were in a similar position to that person, or imagine how it might feel? Can this assist us to better understand the attitude of the 'other' towards us?

Sometimes we and/or the 'other', are too hurt to enter into any act of reconciliation, and need time and space to *cry out against* what has happened. In this case, how can we begin to cultivate a desire to heal a relationship which is so painful and seems impossible to mend? One way, I suggest, is through prayer - consistently holding the 'other', ourselves and our community in God's love.

Perhaps it would be easier if broken and destructive relationships could be mended by force. But they need more than the insertion of a screw or two! In the world today, defeating the evil of ISIS with bombs and bullets often results in terrorism re-appearing in other places in other forms.

In 1 Kings 19:9-16, Elijah told God how his enemies were seeking to kill him. God's reply to Elijah, was found not in the power of a great wind, an earthquake or a fire, but in "a sound of sheer silence" (NRSV).