

In the name of God who is creator, redeemer, and life giver. Amen.

Thank you. Thank you, my sister, for the warm words of welcome. I was commenting during the forum that I feel particularly at home because the church I was brought up in, in Aotearoa New Zealand, was dedicated to St. James. So, I feel okay, I'm home.

And maybe just to say also I'm here with my colleague Palani from South Africa. Where's Palani? Is he somewhere, there? Okay. He comes from Durban, which he thinks is the most beautiful city in South Africa. And I come from Cape Town, which I know is the most beautiful city. And I see my sister Nicole, the chaplain at Bishop's. We've been this whole week, the privilege of being at Bishop's School.

It's very tempting on a Sunday like this as to what one should or shouldn't preach about. Should it be about football, about who won and who lost, which could be very dangerous ground. It could indeed be about Halloween. But when I look at and I come to a church for the first time, I always wonder what lies behind the faces. There's that expression in English, what you see is what you get. One of those many expressions that's not true. I have no idea what story lies behind your faces. And also, how is it with your souls today? Do you come here with sadness in your heart, with joy or sorrow, or so many mixed emotions?

I know I have mixed emotions today because of this terrible tragedy that took place in Seoul where young people were celebrating Halloween yesterday and 59 died and were crushed to death. And a friend of Palani and myself, their daughter was there but survived. So, you have this sense of relief that the one you know survived, and yet so many other young people lost their lives. Supposed to be a day of national celebration, the first big celebration they've had since lockdown, and so many young people lost their lives.

But today I would like to preach to you from a non-existent biblical verse. And the non-existent biblical verse is "the time has come to forgive and forget". Now, Palani and I are from Institute for Healing of Memories, so we seek to contribute to the healing journey of individuals, communities, and nations. And so, the work we do is creating what we would call safe and sacred spaces where people can tell each other their stories and deal with what they have inside them. Originally, a process developed in South Africa, but now global

because of course woundedness is part of the human experience. All of us during our earthly life, both wound others and are wounded ourselves to greater or lesser degree, and our lives are shaped so often by those wounds.

Now, on one occasion we were in part of South Africa called the Eastern Cape, a part of South Africa that has a long history, both of repression and also resistance, especially during the apartheid years. And it was a group of clergy, and they were telling terrible stories, stories of torture and of imprisonment, of repression, oppression. And then one of them suddenly jumped to his feet and said, "The time has come to forgive and forget." I said, "Okay Pastor, why do you say that?" He said, "Because the Bible says so." I said, "Please show me the verse." Well, he's still there in the Eastern Cape looking through the Bible trying to find that non-existent biblical verse.

As I travel the world, so often people say to me, "I would like to forget the past, but I cannot. I would like to forget the past, but I cannot." So, I started to ask myself, "Well, as people of faith, are we supposed to forget the past?" And of course, if we look first at the Hebrew scriptures, perhaps the greatest theme throughout the Hebrew scriptures is the Exodus story. The story of the people of Israel being slaves in Egypt and being freed to come to the Promised land. And so often the prophets would say to the Jewish people, "the reason you are messing up is you've forgotten where you come from, you've forgotten the God who walked with you, who talked with you. Remember, remember, remember." And of course, year by year the Jewish people until today celebrate the Passover as that celebration, as they remember that night of nights when they began the journey towards freedom. So, remember.

And what about the Christian scriptures? Well, what is it we are going to be doing here today? We're going to respond to the call of Jesus to remember. "Take, eat, this is my body, this is my blood. Do this in memory of me." So, for 2000 years we've come, whether in a Catholic tradition every day or a weekly tradition or a monthly tradition, whatever it is, we come in response of the command to remember.

So, next time somebody tells you that we should just forget the past, tell them their talking junk. It is not true. Whether you're a Christian, whether you are

Jewish, whether you are a Muslim, you belong to one of the world's three great remembering religions.

But we do have to ask a question, what kind of memory is it that scripture enjoins us to have? And I want to suggest you that it is redemptive memory. What do I mean by redemptive memory? Redemptive memory is about good that comes out of evil, life that comes out of death. The journey from slavery to freedom. And in the Jesus story: the suffering, the betrayal, the crucifixion, the death and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Redemptive memory, good that comes out of evil, life that comes out of death. But you and I know that often there's another kind of memory we have, memory that we could call destructive memory, or memory that is filled with poison. Wars are kept going by memory as grandparents tell their grandchildren stories filled with poison. "Don't you ever, ever, ever trust them because of what they did to us."

So, the question is how do we move from destructive memory, memory that has poison connected to it to redemptive or life-giving memory?

I'd like to suggest to you that often the key of moving from destructive memory to life giving memory is in the power of acknowledgement. When we are able to admit that what happened was wrong, when we are able to say we are sorry, we know the power in our intimate relationships of "darling, I'm sorry I was wrong." Of course, darling might say, "I'm still hot, come back tomorrow." It takes some time.

And across the world issues of saying sorry haunt nations. Know we're speaking about Korea. The relationship between Korea and Japan is still fraught because of the so-called comfort women during the Second World war who still today seek what they see as full apology. And some of us believe that the United States of America cannot heal until this full acceptance and apology for its two original sins of slavery and the genocide of indigenous people.

But I could have mentioned country after country that are haunted by their past. And the preferred historic option after a terrible period of history is to seek to bury and to forget. The only problem is it's something that ain't worked nowhere yet. You push it underground, and sometimes, like in Germany at the end of the second World War, there was silence for a generation, but it didn't go away. And of course, perhaps the greatest reason for denial is because we

don't want to deal with guilt and shame, some of the hardest emotions to deal with. Yet when we are able to, we can find our way to a society that is at peace with itself and where we can look each other in the eye.

But I want you to think also about the difference between knowledge and acknowledgement. So for example, maybe in a family there's abuse going on, everybody in the family knows about the abuse, but it's a guilty secret. There's knowledge, but there's no acknowledgement.

I just remember, where my sister Nicole worked for many years in the beautiful land of Hawaii. We were working with a group of women all of whom had been abused across generations. And at one felt point, I felt moved to say, I feel guilt and shame as a man for what you have experienced as women. And one of the women began to cry. And she said, "Never in my life have I heard a man say I'm sorry for what you have experienced." Now, I have personally not been responsible for the abuse, but I'm a man, and it was men who had abused women across the generations.

The power of acknowledgement. Not the acknowledgement is not the end of the journey, it's a beginning of a new journey. And of course, the other reason we fear it across the world is not just guilt and shame, but because of the issue of reparations. It's interesting, in South Africa, we in the white community were quite happy to say to black people we're sorry. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission said there should be a one-off wealth tax, the white community went ballistic because it was going to touch our pockets.

Think about acknowledgement and our intimate relations and our families and our communities and the church. I know the Episcopal church is going through its own journey in relation to slavery in terms of acknowledgement as well as in terms of reparations. But let me come to the other part of the verse. Forgive, forgive, forgive. And indeed, I think the Psalm we sang began with words about forgiveness. (I'm just trying to prove that I was listening in church this morning.) But forgiveness is such a key word for us. Many of us learned it on our mother's knee as we first learned the Lord's prayer. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

And of course, we hear it in the words of Jesus on the cross. What's interesting on the cross, Jesus doesn't

forgive anybody, he offers a prayer to his father. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And because forgiveness is so central to our faith, often we create the impression that forgiveness is something simple and cheap and easy. And my experience, most human beings find forgiveness, costly, painful, and difficult. Sometimes when I work with clergy, I say, "My sisters and brothers of the cloth, do you find forgiveness easy in your own life?" And they shake their heads, and they say no. So, I say "when you preach, you tell your people that?" "Oh no, we never tell them that." Present company exempted.

And sometimes after I've preached around forgiveness, people say to me, the most helpful thing you said to us was that it's difficult, because I thought there was something wrong with me that I struggle with it. But where does forgiveness begin? Of course, if I'm the perpetrator, it begins with me. Where I say I'm the one, I did it, I did it. I accept, I take responsibility. And the second step is as people of faith, we go to our creator, and we say, "I'm the one. I need your forgiveness." And of course, the third step will be when we go to the one that we've wronged.

I forgot to ask. Rebecca and I didn't have much time this morning. We spoke on the phone yesterday and there was a question I forgot to ask her. At St. James by-the-Sea, do you have bicycle theology?

Mo. Rebecca: I don't think so. Maybe.

She's an Episcopalian. She wants to be a bit on the fence. Tell me, how many of you here own bicycles? Bicycles? Yes. Let me see. Keep up your hands those who own bicycles. Who owns a bicycle? Why is it only on the right side of the church? Okay, the left side of the church.

[To a member of the congregation sitting in a pew] My friend, you own a bicycle?

Yes.

Okay, so today I stole your bicycle, and I just want to come and confess and say to you, I'm very, very, very sorry that I stole your bicycle. Will you forgive me?

Yes, of course. Go and sin no more.

He forgives me, and I keep the bike. So often we reduce forgiveness to saying sorry, and we don't return the bike. In fact, there's a beautiful scriptural passage. Do

you read the Bible in this church? Yes? Sometimes? No, you don't read the Bible. Okay. It's against your church teaching to read it?

There's a beautiful story in the Bible about bicycle theology, does anybody know it? Does anybody know? Any ideas? I mean, the choir, those are the really religious ones, they will know. Bicycle theology.

[From a member of the choir] Perhaps the story of the prodigal son?

The story of the prodigal son?

[From another member of the choir] The parable of the talents?

Parable of the talents. What was the gospel today? Today's gospel was... it should have had underneath it, equals bicycle theology. Because what is the story of Zacchaeus? We just heard it read. Can anybody remember? You heard it 10 minutes ago. Who does the Zacchaeus work for?

[From the audience] The government.

The IRS. The IRS. And he's corrupt. He's corrupt. So, the money that belongs to the nation, he's putting in his own pocket. And by the way, do you know the chorus about Zacchaeus? Do you sing it in your Sunday school? Can the choir sing it? You don't do it?

[From a member of the choir] What is it?

Zacchaeus was a real little man.

[Some choir members singing]

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
And a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see.
And as the Savior passed that way
He looked up in the tree,
And he said, "Zacchaeus you come down, For I'm going
to your house today!"
For I'm going to your house today!*

There's hope for the Episcopal church. You see what happens? Zacchaeus meets Jesus. He doesn't say you're a corrupt tax collector, he says I'm coming to your house for tea. And in the space of the meeting with Jesus, Zacchaeus confronts who he is, who he's not, and

who he is called to be. And so, Zacchaeus says, "I will return what I took wrongfully, times ____? [*asking audience, no response*]

Oh, my goodness.

[*From Mo. Rebecca*] Four.

Thank you. At least the priest remembered. So, I will return your bicycle with new tires and a bell. In other words, not just with mathematical exactitude, but with generosity of spirit.

But we all know of situations where it's not as easy as returning the bike. Sometimes we don't even know who was responsible. In my own case, as I am here today in this church, I don't know who sent me a letter bomb in 1990. I don't know who gave the orders. I don't know who wrote my name on an envelope. So, I often say I'm not full of hatred, I'm not bitter, I don't want revenge. But for me, forgiveness is not yet on the table because there is no one to forgive. And I don't know what it means to forgive an abstraction. If you know, that's fine. I don't know what that means. But in my mind, I imagine an encounter with the person who sent me a bomb. Of course, reality may be very different, but in my imagination, someone knocks on the door, and they say, "I sent you that letter bomb. Will you forgive me?"

Now, forgiveness is on the table. What do I say? Yes, no, not yet, or excuse me, sir, do you still make letter bombs? He says, "No, no, no, no. I work close to you at the local hospital. Will you forgive me." Yes sir, I forgive you, and I would prefer that you spend the rest of your life working in that hospital rather than be locked up in prison, because I believe a thousand times more in the justice of restoration than the justice of punishment.

So often when we say justice, we mean punishment, if not revenge. There's another kind of justice, the justice of restoring relationships. So then perhaps I sit down, and I drink tea with my new friend, and I say, "My friend, I've forgiven you, but I still have no hands. I've forgiven you, but I still only have one eye. I've forgiven you; my eardrums are still permanently damaged. I'll always need someone to assist me for the rest of my life. Of course, you will help pay for that person, not as a condition of forgiveness, but as part of reparation and restitution and the ways that are possible."

I hope, my dear friends, that as you listen to me today and the days ahead, you'll reflect on do you have bicycles that need to be returned, as individuals, as a

church, as a nation and the world? I think that forgiveness is often so big that we need the power, what the church calls grace, the power that comes from God to even want to forgive. But often before we can travel the journey of forgiveness, often we need our pain to be heard. Often when we are hurting, well-meaning church people say, "And you should forgive." And we increase their burdens. Where often what we need is a hug, not a sermon.

And yet for some people, forgiveness is the key to their healing, which is why I say we need the power of God to want to forgive. But my sisters and brothers, what does God promise us on these journeys of healing, on these journeys of forgiveness? Well, in my case, God did not say it was a bomb, don't open it. I opened it. And yet in that experience, I felt God's presence with me.

To me, the great promise of scripture was kept. Not that we will not suffer, but "Io, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." And that is the promise that we claim once more in this communion, this holy Eucharist, this Mass as we take the bread, take the wine and we offer it to God, and God gives it back to us, Christ's body and blood as food for our journey. Amen.