

# The Church *is* Relational

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Life in the family of God

# What we covered last week

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- We shared how the legacy and spirit of the Parish of Whangarei has been felt by the city and how it has touched your life.
- We explored our own stories, naming the important people and moments that have shaped our faith.
- We considered the societal struggles and challenges faced by some people in Whangarei, and explored how the Good News may be spoken into those situations.
- Finally, we saw how the gifts, talents and skills God has gifted us could be used in response to these challenges.

# Opening Devotion

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The story of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

# What we will explore today

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- What is reconciliation and why is it important to Christian community?
- What does it look like to be reconciled with ourselves and with God?
- What does it look like to be reconciled with our church community?
- What does it look like to be reconciled with the wider institution of the Church?
- What does it look like to be reconciled with the kingdom of God?
- What are some of the attitudes necessary in the process of reconciliation?

# What is reconciliation for you?

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- Just as with the word 'church' from week 3, reconciliation is a word we use often but consider little.
- As you will have gathered from the outline, it is a concept that encompasses everything from the cosmic to the personal.
- What has reconciliation meant for you in your life? What does the word evoke for you?

# What is reconciliation

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- Within the Christian tradition, reconciliation is deeply tied with sin
  - Sacrificial system
  - Atonement theory
- Relationally, a consequence of sin is brokenness
  - Forgiveness is only the beginning of the journey of reconciliation
  - It takes one party to step out in faith to begin the process
- Reconciliation requires ongoing relational faithfulness

# What prevents reconciliation with God?

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- What within us could prevent us from being right with ourselves?
- What within us could prevent us from being right with God?
- A lack of forgiveness of others can prevent us from being reconciled with ourselves and with God.
- To not forgive is to hold the other in a 'debtors prison'.

# A step towards reconciliation

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We lay down our need before you, holy God of compassion and grace, trusting in your great love for us and for all creation.

We bear wounds, and we ourselves have wounded others.

We open ourselves to the work of your Spirit among us to free us from all that is not of you and to recreate us in your image.

Praise and thanksgiving, honour and blessing be to you, divine source of healing and love, through your Word of grace made flesh, and your Spirit of holiness and power. Amen.

# Unreconciled Church Community

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- What are the consequences of unreconciled church community?
- What does being unreconciled mean for our place in God's mission?
- What prevents reconciliation within our church?
- How might our community be reconciled to itself, its past and its future?

# A step towards reconciliation

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# Brokenness with the church's institution

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Over a break, discuss with others:

- Where you believe the institution of the church may have caused brokenness in this community.
- How this community's actions may have contributed to this brokenness.
- Why would it be important for this relationship to be reconciled?

When you return, be prepared to share some of these conversations.

# A step towards reconciliation

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Praise and thanksgiving, honour and blessing be to you, divine source of healing and love, through your Word of grace made flesh, and your Spirit of holiness and power. Amen.

# An unreconciled kingdom?

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The idea of the kingdom of God as 'unreconciled' is laughable, but it is a reality we usually live out.

- The kingdom is greater than the Church, but we cannot shrink from its calling.
- What may prevent us as individual and as a church community from fuller reconciliation with the kingdom of God?
- Who rules our kingdom, the father or the older brother?

# A step towards reconciliation

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We bear wounds, and we ourselves have wounded others.

We open ourselves to the work of your Spirit among us to free us from all that is not of you and to recreate us in your image.

Praise and thanksgiving, honour and blessing be to you, divine source of healing and love, through your Word of grace made flesh, and your Spirit of holiness and power. Amen.

## Steps within the process...

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Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?' So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Genesis 50:15-21

## Steps within the process...

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The process of reconciliation is a difficult one that involves courage and conviction. Our faith offers us much in the process however. As you consider a grudge you hold or a wrong you cannot let go of, think on these three points from Joseph.

- Whose seat am I in?
- Am I in the valley or on the hilltop?
- Can I love my way through this?

These set our hearts right as we engage with those who have wronged us.

# Where to from here?

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Lent is a time of preparation, and we have spent this time studying, praying and contemplating the vision of our community. As we live into the Easter reality, we seek to incarnate this work in the life of the parish.

- We have recognised that the Church is declining
- We have recognised that the Church is transforming
- We have recognised that the Church is alive
- We have recognised that we are part of the Church in this place
- We have recognised that the Church is about reconciliation