
Human encounter is the essence of cure, in the deepest sense.
Adrian Van Kaam

The power of human encounter

Corrymeela Sunday 2017

Reflections and prayers on the Lectionary Texts for Sunday 19th March 2017.
Ex 17:1-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5:1-11, John 4:5-42.

You are welcome to use all, or some of this resource.

We are delighted to invite you to Carafest, a festival of faith and reconciliation at Corrymeela this Easter (14th-17th April 2017). For more details about this and other events, see corrymeela.org/events

corrymeela 

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The Corrymeela Community

Corrymeela members are people of all ages and Christian traditions who, individually and together, are committed to the healing of social, religious and political divisions that exist in Northern Ireland and throughout the world. Our Community is a dispersed community of individuals from many walks of life and many approaches to faith and values who, in their daily lives, commit to the values and vocation of being a member of the Corrymeela Community - by this we mean incorporating commitment, practice and values into everyday life.

We commit every year at our dedication service to this vision and members are involved in monthly gatherings for worship, community building, learning and witness.

Ray Davey, founded the community in 1965 calling Corrymeela an "Open Village for all people of good will". Corrymeela is proud to have begun in the vibrant environment of a faith tradition that was exploring its boundaries. This has continued. Where once the major divisions were between Christians of Catholic and Protestant identities, we also have become interested and attentive to other areas that divide us - divisions between people of different faiths; between those of a particular faith and none; differences between genders and sexual orientation identities; divides between ethnic, political and economic backgrounds.

The Corrymeela Community brings people of all identities together to explore what it means to live well together. We are active in seeking out those whose life tells a different story, to meet, learn, apologise, change, love and live well together.

Corrymeela is people. We are young people, middle-aged and old people, we are people of doctrine and people of doubt. We engage with the differences of our world. We disagree with each other, and we seek to disagree agreeably. We know we're part of the problems of the world. We work hard to be part of the solution. We are people of prayers and protest, curiosity and questioning, work and learning. We are Corrymeela. And you are always welcome.

On Exodus 17

Is he here
or is he not?
We were told that he was.
Our cracked lips
say he's gone.
Our cracked lips
say he's gone.

Moses is our special leader.
We like to have a leader.
Moses said God said:
'Journey here.' We did.

But is he here
or is he not?
We were told that he was.
Our dry mouths
say he's left.
Our dry mouths
say he's left.

Are we to deny
our aching bodies?
Are we to say
'Our throats aren't parched?'

But is he here
or is he not?
We were told that he was.
Our dusty words croak:
We are lost.
Our dusty words croak:
We are lost.

Are we to say
to our failing children:
'The Lord is here in your hungry belly.
The Lord is here in your painful swallow.
The Lord is here in your rumbling innards.
The Lord is here in your sweat and swoon.'
So, is he here
or is he not?
We were told that he was.
Our trembling hands
Say he's flown.
Our trembling hands
Say he's flown.

Maybe Moses got it wrong
Maybe he misheard the song.
Maybe Moses wasn't right,
And led us into this dark night?

So, is he here
or is he not?
We were told that he was.
Our tortured dreams
Predict the worst.
Our tortured dreams
Predict the worst.

Our famished wails
Provoke the camp
to thoughts of righteous murder,
forging a sword from the growing mutter:

We need to end this awful ache.
We must destroy this pain.
We need someone to blame,
No matter what their fame.

So, is he here
or is he not?
Our sand-cut eyes
Make looking sore.
Our broken sandals
Make us stumble.

We need someone to kill.
We need that quick-fix painkiller pill
We can't find God, so Gods' main man
Will have to do. Lets do him in.
Target the man who we believed
Spoke of God's
Liberation.

Lets kill Moses, man of God.
He has led us to our limits.
He led us to the edge
of hell in a dusty empty cup.

So, is he here
or is he not?
We were told that he was.
Is he here
or is he not?
We were told that he was.

Paul Hutchinson is the former Centre Director of Corrymeela. He is a therapist, mediator and artist.

On Romans 5:1-11 Therefore since we are.

The mainly white churches of the British suburbs will not survive and flourish without receiving the witness of the stranger.

Our ritualistic church, not entirely child friendly, was joined in September by Luda, a 14 year old from Estonia, dragging along behind her her mother and little brother. She knew when to cross herself, joined the choir, sang a solo, never missed, and felt obliged to tell her classmates that she is a Christian and comes to St Cedd's. We heard about this because her year tutor discovered that she was being bullied as a Christian and as 'an illegal immigrant.' But she still has a look of joy and resolution on her face. She seems to know something that most of us don't know – perhaps something of what St Paul knew – 'that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which he has given to us' (verses 4 and 5).

It's the same with my friend Didi, from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Didi has been here for 14 years, since the assassination of his father, a general. He's now 38. He still has no right to be here. He's been in three prisons, not for criminal activity but for his ability to organise demonstrations in detention centres. He has a roof over his head but no money, only handouts from asylum charities, and the money my 96 year old mother gives him. And he has something about him. One can only say he knows he is loved by God. That, 'while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.' (Verse 6) I always come from his house touched by joy. And the same is true of Miriam, a Muslim convert from Afghanistan, and Gloria from Zimbabwe, both thankfully now granted refugee status, and thousands of others.

Am I in danger of romanticising the awful life of the refugee? I probably am. However, these witnesses do share something with St Paul, and all the other witnesses from the New Testament. That the utter fragility of everything else has enabled a great breakthrough – to their dependence on something deep and other, which we do well to call God, though the experience is more important than the name.

The churches I know best are tempted to offer the grace of the gospel, for example the gorgeous warmth of the Christmas message, while extracting it from the bleak context in which grace emerged – the stable is cosy, and the murder of the Innocents is hidden away when no one is in church.

This increasingly is not going to work. When Isaiah talked of a great light appearing, he was writing from a place near to and similar to modern Aleppo.

When we lose our fear and welcome these gracious strangers, they bring us a message – ‘that we boast in God through Our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.’ (Verse 11)

Rob Wiggs is a member of the Corrymeela Community. With studies in Classics, he is ordained in the Church of England and lives in Chelmsford.

On Psalm 95, a reflection.

When I read this Psalm through the lens of human encounter there are two verses that stick out for me. Verse 1 where the psalmist calls us to sing to the Lord and verse 8 where he urges us not to harden our hearts.

I experience my emotions intensely. Sometimes I really wish I didn't and at other times I am so glad I do. At times I truly feel like my heart is singing. When I am bursting full of joy and gratitude for the people, the potential, the adventure and the beauty of life. In those moments I feel like my whole being is singing to the Lord. It is also in those moments that my human encounters thrive; my joy radiates out, serving and loving others comes naturally and I embrace any opportunities to get to know people. The flip side, however, of being my emotional self, is that my heart can become easily hardened. All too often my anxieties and fears take me into a powerful cycle of thought that hardens my heart to myself, to others and to God. At those times my human encounters suffer. I lose my patience and get frustrated with those around me, I snap at those I love and attack them with hurtful words, I stop letting people in and instead close myself off.

People say that if you want to love others you first have to love yourself. That is something I have always struggled to accept. In the busyness of life it can be difficult to find the time to take care of ourselves and the idea of loving ourselves can seem like a selfish one. However, when I reflect on my human encounters through the words of this Psalm, that idea definitely rings true. The more my heart sings, the more able I am to love and serve and laugh with those around me. The more my heart is hardened the less able I am to do so and the more likely my human encounters are to instead be hurtful and damaging.

God provides us with many tools to soften our hearts and help them to sing but I find it is so easy to forget they are there or to not bother using them. It is such a privilege to live and work in a place like Corrymeela where I am surrounded by such tools; swimming in the sea, having rich conversations with good friends and spending time in quiet reflection in the Croí are some of the many things that help my heart to sing up here. Today I encourage you to reflect on the tools around you that help to soften your heart and to sing to the Lord. Join me in the challenge of allowing our human encounters to reach their full potential by loving ourselves. Let's soften our hearts and strengthen our song.

Questions for group discussion

- When do you sing to the Lord?
- What can harden your heart?
- How do those experiences affect your everyday human encounters with those around you?
- What softens your heart or helps you sing to God?
- What simple step could you take this week to soften your heart and strengthen your song?

Kerry Logan graduated with a degree in French and Law from Aberdeen in 2016. A child of Corrymeela Community members, she is now spending an internship year in communications and the executive department of Corrymeela.

On John 4: In honour of the Samaritan woman.

becoming

how do we know when change
is transformative
or traumatic?

how do we know before we let go
to embrace change
in all its ways
whether it will grow or prevent growth?

is transformation
always present
always possible?

can we grow through anything?

suffering
chosen
and
not chosen?

how to hear out radical change
new directions
new encounters
through which we will become
inevitably
hopefully, please God:

more ourselves.

yes?

Colleen Brown, born in San Francisco with Donegal / Newcastle upon Tyne roots, lives in Dublin. She is a mother and works as a therapist, spiritual director and facilitator in the areas of trauma, bereavement and post traumatic growth.

On John 4. "Perhaps..."

Why do we make negative about the woman at the well's social reputation ?

It comes so quickly to our minds that she is a sinner, sleeping around, having it with everybody...

'I have no husband...'

'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband...

We read so much into Jesus's voice:

We put in sarcasm, judgement, catching her in a trap, tripping up her lie...

We imagine Jesus probing, examining and, like Holmes or Poirot, dramatically turning and bringing a finger down to her face:

'You are RIGHT in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had FIVE HUSBANDS! And the one you have NOW is NOT YOUR HUSBAND!!!

Why do we assume Jesus spoke that way to her?

Women in Jesus's society couldn't initiate a divorce.

They could only have one thrust upon them...

Women could be abandoned;

Women could be widowed...

Women could be pushed around from family member to family member...

Husband's brother, husband's other brother, his brother-in-law, back to her father, over to her brother (the one with the wife who loathes her and bullies her)...

Perhaps here first husband- a responsible, good and righteous man, who loved her and treasured her beyond all things- was on his way to Jericho when he was set upon by robbers who beat him and robbed him left him for dead, and the kindness of strangers only held off death for two days...

Perhaps her life had collapsed into turmoil...

Perhaps her life was a long litany of loss, pain, frustration, and powerlessness...

Life could be cruel and capricious in first-century rural societies...

Life can be cruel and capricious in a modern village, town, or city...

We don't know the details of this woman's life. But we know who Jesus was.

He told us who he was:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,

Because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

(Perhaps the woman was poor...)

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

(Perhaps she was brokenhearted...)

To proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners;

(Perhaps she was trapped...)

To proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God,

(Perhaps she felt grievously wronged, by men, by life... by God...)

To comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion;

(Perhaps she spent every day sick with grief...)

To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,

(Perhaps it was some time since she had felt beautiful...)

The oil of joy instead of mourning,

(Perhaps she needed a reason to celebrate...)

And a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

(Perhaps she needed to believe again that there was a God...)

Perhaps...

In the light of all these 'perhaps's', read Jesus's words again.

What does he sound like?

Perhaps he sounds that way with everyone...

Jon Hatch is a theologian, educator, activist, and Corrymeela member.

On John 4 — The Samaritan Woman and Jesus engage in conversation.

This text has been taken from our new project "Spirituality of Conflict" a free online resource that provides reflections on conflict through the lens of the Sunday Gospel readings. www.spiritualityofconflict.com

This week's text in light of last week's text:

Last week we read of Nicodemus' meeting with Jesus. Now Jesus meets the woman from Samaria at Jacob's well. The contrast between these Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman couldn't be more stark. Nicodemus, the Pharisee, powerful, respectable, community leader, an insider, seeks out Jesus by night. The Samaritan is an outsider, and outcast, disreputable, marginalized who meets Jesus, not by night, but in the glaring light of the midday sun.

Who are the outsiders for you?

As is so frequent in St John's Gospel, signs and symbols abound. The location of this encounter is significant. Jacob's well is a reminder and assurance of God's care for all God's people, a well that doesn't run dry. Jesus is travelling through Samaria. That may have a short cut for his journey, but to travel through Samaria was certainly the road-less-travelled for any self-respecting Jew.

Jesus speaking alone with a woman went against the social etiquette of the day, but for a Jewish man to speak with a Samaritan woman was totally unacceptable – as the disciples unspoken criticism makes clear "Why are you speaking with her?" (verse 27) and the woman's own comment "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (verse 8) It is likely that this woman came to Jacob's well at midday because very few other people would choose such a laborious task in such extreme heat. With a reputation like hers it was easier to choose a time when no-one else was around.

It's worth remembering how vital it is in the Middle East to have access to water.. Today access to water is a major factor in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The Samaritan's woman's life was shaped and burdened by the constant necessity to visit this well for water. Jesus talks to her about those "who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

Hearing of this life-liberating opportunity woman says "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Liberation for this woman is not just around drawing water. This woman's life was plagued by a lack of security and identity. She had a succession of husbands – in those days it was the husband that provided security and identity for his bride. She had neither. We are not told the circumstances which led to her many husbands but It is worth noting that Jesus does not condemn her as a sinner. Jesus points out the circumstances of her life as a way of letting her know that he understands why she is so thirsty for this 'living water'.

The Samaritan woman is clearly moved by this response and acknowledges that this Jewish rabbi is indeed a prophet, but a Jewish rabbi! So what is the answer to the age old dispute between Jews and Samaritans, about the appropriate place for the worship of God. Jesus responds by telling her what is important for worship is not the place of worship, but to worship in spirit and truth. Suddenly this woman sees that amidst the confusion of the theological arguments about the place of worship, this Jewish rabbi is tell her she can worship God in spirit and in truth.

This is indeed Good News! Jesus has been talking about the fulfilment of God's promises, and the dawning of a new age. Her thoughts immediately turn to the coming Messiah. She is ready (almost) to hear Jesus say "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." (v26)

So the woman runs off back to the city, buzzing with hope, which sounds almost too good to be true. She tells everyone about her conversation with Jesus adding He cannot be the Messiah, can he? The question expecting a negative reply! She doesn't expect to be believed. After all why should anyone believe someone like her? The most unlikely witness became the means whereby many others lives were transformed as they came to meet Jesus and asked him to stay with them for some days.

Response: 'Us' and 'Them'

The need to learn how we can live with those who are different from us, is an urgent global task. It is natural to gravitate towards those who are like 'us' and to distance ourselves from those who are different, like 'them'.

Take a moment to reflect on who might belong to 'them' for you.

- Recall a time when you felt uncomfortable walking through a particular area? What made you uncomfortable?
- Recall a time when you saw someone, or a group of people who you wished to avoid? What about them, made you want to avoid them?
- Are there people you find difficult to trust? Why?

In a conflict or when we feel threatened the barriers between 'us' and 'them' tends to harden.

Distancing the 'Other'

- Now think of the Samaritan woman, 'the other' – the one who is excluded, shunned, cut off, disapproved of by 'respectable' people.
- What feelings would surface if you were treated like that?
- How would you characterise Jesus' approach to her? If you were the Samaritan woman how would your response to Jesus be different than to those who exclude you?
- Jesus command was that we should 'Love our enemies'. Enemies include those whom we distance because we think they are morally in error. Does Jesus mean 'Draw the enemy close'?
- Is there ever a time when we should distance ourselves from others because they are different?

Trevor is a former Leader of the Corrymeela Community. He is an Anglican Bishop, Chair of Christian Aid Ireland and has been a member of Corrymeela since the 1970s. Since retirement is free to give more time to the life and work of Corrymeela and its work for Reconciliation which he believes lies at the heart of the Jesus' message.

Collect (in Irish and English) for Corrymeela Sunday.

An Crinniú

A Íosa, uisce na beatha,
Is tusa ár dtobar agus ár bhfáilte
agus i gcomhrá
- tusa linne agus sinn leatsa
aimsítear filíocht ár saoil

Go gcuardaímid an comhrá céanna seo
idir muintir réabtha.

Go dtabharfaimid
ár scéalta agus ár mbrón
ár gcaointe agus ár saolta
chuig a chéile
san áit roinnte, sábháilte seo

Agus mar sin pobal a aimsiú
in áiteanna iontach aisteacha

Amen.

The Collect:

Jesus, water of life
You are our well and our welcome
and in conversation
— us with you and you with us —
we find the poetry of our lives.

May we search for this same conversation
between divided peoples.

May we bring
our stories and our sadness
our laments and our lives
to each other
in this shared place.

And so find community
in strange and surprising places.

Amen.

Pádraig Ó Tuama is a poet and theologian, and is the leader of the Corrymeela Community.

Intercession Prayers for the day:

Today we remember the victims of violence, and those who are left behind. We honour the names of all who have been killed or injured, especially those who are forgotten or ignored. We remember that you, God, know the name of every person. In your name, and in the names of those who've suffered, we commit to praying and working for the cessation of violence.

We acknowledge that we are complicit in the fractures that have undone us. We, who try to be people of peace, are also at the heart of pain and separation. As we reflect on the past twelve months of elections, referenda and policies, may we turn towards each other, in heartfelt reconciliation, life-giving argument and support of the most marginalised. You walk among us, God, in the lives and stories of the people we meet. May we hear you, see you, meet you and love you, in our responses to each other.

Today we honour those who reach out to their neighbours, those who form unexpected and surprising friendships across lines of difference. We honour those people who break categories by giving and receiving generosity across barriers. We honour and bless them. And we honour and bless God, the source of all love.

Today we pray for the people of Ireland, north and south. In a season of political and jurisdictional uncertainty, we pray for voices of peace and belonging to be heard, especially in times and places of fear and hostility.

We give thanks for the gift of change. We give thanks for those who have turned from violence and separation and, like Paul, use their gifts for the common good. We pray for all those who deliberately sow discord. May they be faced, again and again, with reason and opportunity to change their ways. And may we, too, be faced with the same opportunities.

We give thanks for the work of Corrymeela. Begun by Ray Davey, a survivor from a prisoner of war camp in the Second World war, he was able to take this experience of shadow and turn it into a witness of shelter. May all of us find the courage to turn from shadows to shelter, and in so doing, provide kindness and community for those around us.