

## Leadership and Reconciliation

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*This Bible study comes from a sermon preached at St. Johns Glebe August 9th, 2020 and from conversations Ray Minniecon has been having with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rev. Justin Welby. Together they are discussing how the "Difference Course" can reflect the need for Reconciliation. The course explores what it means to follow Jesus in the face of conflict and see transformation through everyday encounters. The Difference Course encourages people to develop three key habits.*

### **Habits of reconciliation**

- *Be Curious. Listen to other people's stories and see how the world looks through their eyes.*
- *Be Present. Encounter others with authenticity and confidence*
- *Reimagine: Find hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change*

Read Exodus 3: 1-14 - Moses and the Burning Bush

I believe these three habits encourage us to look at this story of Moses again to help us understand how power relationships operate.

I want to invite you to see the power relationships in this story through the three different yet inter-related discourses. I use the term 'discourse' to mean a collective voice. In other words:

- What was the collective voice (discourse) of the people in power in this story?
- What was the collective voice (discourse) of the people without power in this story?
- What is the discourse of God in this story?
- How does this story relate to the story of reconciliation and leadership with my people and other colonised and marginalised people groups?

### **Discourse of the powerful**

The first discourse we want to examine is the discourse of the powerful. Pharaoh represents this discourse. He had the power and authority over everything in Egypt. Through Pharaoh, we get a glimpse of how this discourse operates.

This discourse says things like this:

*"As the Pharaoh of this great nation I want people to know that we own everything. We govern everything, we control everything. We are a sovereign power. We will determine who comes into our country and who doesn't. We design the systems and the structures that will help us achieve our purposes. We will determine who benefits from the land. Those benefits will be delivered and dispersed to whom we choose. We will design the systems and structures that deliver these benefits and the services that go with it. We own the wealth of the land and all its resources. We will design and implement policies at our discretion. We have the knowledge. We have the experience. We will act according to our understanding. We have the power and the authority to act according to our will. If you want something or need something you talk to us. We will listen but we will decide to act as we see fit. In the end, we will define you."*

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This discourse also controls access to the land. This discourse says:

"We have the land. We own it. We write the land laws We determine who lives in it and where they will live. We will design the laws that govern the land. We will determine who benefits from the land. We will represent all people. We will decide who represents you."

This is the Discourse of the Powerful, represented by Pharaoh, who has all power and authority at his disposal.

I find it is sobering to realize that the Discourse of the Powerful is alive and well today. I hear it with an American accent as well as an Arab accent. I definitely hear it with an Australian accent as well as an Asian accent. Sadly, I hear it also with a Christian accent and a religious accent.

### **Discourse of the powerless**

In stark contrast to the Discourse of the Powerful is the Discourse of the Powerless. The children of Israel who are slaves in the land of Egypt for some 400 years or more, represent and characterize this discourse through their oppression and submission to the might of Pharaoh.

In this story their discourse says things like:

*"I am a slave. My master has power and control over my life. I must obey my master, at all costs. He will re-define me according to his perception of me. He will use me as a means of production for his purposes and for the success of the rich and powerful in his world. I am politically impotent and powerless. I have no future. I have no land. I have no access to economic empowerment. My identity, my dignity, my integrity and destiny are determined by the discourse of the powerful who control me. No one will listen to me. I belong on the fringes of society. I am socially, politically and geographically marginalized. I am nobody. I can't breathe! The meaning of my whole existence is to be used by the Powerful for their economic and social benefit and for their enjoyment and entertainment. I must not make them feel uncomfortable about his position of privilege and power and actions toward me."*

I know this Discourse of the Powerless. I have personal experiences with this Discourse of the Powerless. I work and live among this Discourse of the Powerless. As Australia's First Nations Peoples, we continue to be colonised and defined for the past 200 years as depraved, non-human, lazy and primitive peoples. We still live and experience these perceptions daily.

I am reminded of the quote from a Black South African writer and activist, Steve Biko: who once said, "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the minds of the oppressed". When the powerful can capture a person's mind and set the limitations of personal enrichment and distort the image of God as revealed in humanity, they are rendered powerless. I see this in the position of these Jewish slaves. I see this among my First Nations People. I hear this discourse when I conduct another funeral for a young suicide victim, or another death in custody or hear of another sacred site being desecrated or attend a welfare program and hear the stories of despair and hopelessness in our streets.

Read Exodus 1: 1-22 and be attentive to the Discourses of the Powerful and oppressed

### **Discourse of God**

Thirdly, this story is also about the Discourse of God. There are two aspects to this discourse. The Messenger and the Message.

Firstly, the messenger. God met His curious messenger at a sacred place. (Mount Horeb, the mountain of God). At this sacred place He reveals Himself and His plan for deliverance and reconciliation to help these Jewish slaves reimagine a new almost impossible future. All God seeks is a messenger to act on His behalf. Someone who will take on the Ministry of reconciliation and deliver the message of hope and reconciliation and help them find hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see transformation and change.

Through His messenger, Moses, God enters into the centre of these two powerful discourses.

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We must realize too, that these two discourses, the Discourses of the Powerful and Discourse of the Powerless are so intrinsically linked together that they seem to be inseparable. Indivisible. Impenetrable. The powerful needed the powerless to fulfill their dreams and desires, and the powerless needed the powerful to exist. This is the place where God enters into this seemingly inseparable, impenetrable and unbreakable relationship.

God's message to both the powerful and the powerless is one message. It can be summarized in one concept. **Freedom!** Shalom! Wholeness. Cosmological equilibrium! Harmony and balance. Kanyini! Connectedness. Freedom for both the powerful and the powerless.

To the powerful He says:

"Let My people go! My people were not designed for slavery."

God's discourse says:

"All humans are made in my image. They are designed for relationship with me alone as their Creator. They were designed to respond to my grace, my love, my purpose, and my authority alone. Therefore, Let my people go!"

To the powerless He says:

"I have a dream. - a dream for a people, united and strong, determining their own future and destiny under God, without hindrance or obstacle in their own Promised Land. I have not created my people for slavery or to be used and abused and controlled by others for their own selfish purposes."

Slavery in any form, including welfare, is dehumanizing.

God says:

"I created you and I alone will determine your destiny. I want you who feel powerless to reimagine a new future, reconciled with me and my purpose."

Self-determination and sovereignty are an important aspect of God's discourse.

This is the Discourse of God.

This is the Discourse of the Cross of Jesus.

Reread Exodus 3: 1-14 - And see how God talks about the powerful and oppressed.

This story can help us understand how these three discourses interact with each other and influence each other in extraordinary ways. But more importantly, this story gives us deeper insight into the message and ministry of reconciliation. (1 Cor 5:18-20)

What does this story say about our story? There are so many lessons from this story. I will outline a few:

The first lesson is to realise that God is not only interested in our story, but He is also inextricably linked to our story through our history and through our struggles. Jesus didn't walk off the boat in 1788. He was already here. Our invaders didn't recognize Jesus among us back then and sadly, still don't. Reconciliation is not primarily about good human relationships. Reconciliation is about justice. Reconciliation costs! It cost the life of God's only Son. One of the principles of reconciliation and justice is accountability and recompense. Pharaoh was weighed in the balances of God's justice and found wanting. Accountability and recompense for wrongdoing is a fundamental principle of reconciliation. God knows how to bring about a true and just reconciliation process. We need to listen to Him or face the social and political consequences. Sometimes, as in this story, He tears nations, peoples and communities apart when injustice and dishonesty rules in order to bring them back together again based on His design, quality and measure of justice and accountability. When He is ready, he determines the process of reconciliation between nations and peoples.

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One stanza in James Russel Lowell's poem, "The Present Crisis" says:

Truth forever on the scaffold,  
 Wrong forever on the throne,—  
 Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
 and, behind the dim unknown,  
 Standeth God within the shadow,  
 keeping watch above his own.

Another lesson is that God enjoys being at the epicentre of these discourses, even if we don't recognise Him. He is the ultimate and consummate Reconciler! (Remember? He came unto His own and his own did not recognise Him.). I have to recognise that God has come into the epicentre of our discourse and into the heart of our collective history and says to the powerful, "Let my people go!". To the powerless. "I have a dream. Of a better future for you." Can we reimagine a new future together under our heavenly Father's rule?

Also, this story has many lessons about leadership.

Moses was not the type of person who would fit the selection criteria for leadership in many of our governments, churches and organizations. Look at his character. He was too old. He seemed to lack courage. He had a criminal record. Remember he had killed two Egyptians and never stood trial for that crime. He was a fugitive from the law. He struggled with his identity— [that is, he was finding his roots just as we have many First Peoples today who are finding their roots again]. He became a bureaucrat and worked for the Egyptian government that oppressed his people. He lacked experience for the job. His only job qualification was that he had looked after sheep for 40 years. He wasn't familiar with the politics of slavery. Yet God chose him. God has a way of choosing the foolish things to confound the wise. If God can use someone like Moses, he can use anyone. So, this story has a lot to say about the type of leadership that can bring reconciliation, deliverance and transformation and re-image what we need for His church and for our nation.

Walking with God between these two powerful discourses is a wild and dangerous experience. One needs good habits as well as the courage and the grace to speak to the powerful and the powerless, regardless of the consequences.

This story points us to Jesus. His Cross is at the epicentre of these two powerful discourses. And because of His cross, we know that God is present among us. Our Creator loves to be in the epicentre of complex situations. Through the Cross, He is still at the epicentre of human history! His Spirit is always searching for ordinary people who are willing to do extraordinary things with Him.

This story tells us that there are still far too many Pharaohs in our world today and because of them we have too many colonised, disenfranchised, marginalized and powerless people. If we want to find God in the centre of situations like this perhaps, we should be looking for old men with walking sticks instead of using young men with rifles.

### Conclusion

I started this study with the proposition about three habits needed for reconciliation. They are:

- Be curious.
- Be present.
- Reimagine.

How can we allow these habits of reconciliation permeate our walk with Jesus as we shoulder our responsibility to work for reconciliation in our church, community and nation and our world?

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