

A Sermon on Forgiveness and David Giffen.

Following the reading of the Christmas Carol last week some folks, not all of this church, came up to me and said that, whatever happens, David Giffen should return to the Redeemer because we believe in forgiveness, and we should practice it here.

I do and I don't agree.

I want to think through my story with David

I want to think through what forgiveness looks like in the teaching of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

DAVID

David, chosen as Incumbent here. Yes! Digital, energetic, new ideas, skilled with younger families, Gospel based, red hair, big smile, infectious good humour.

Good choice!

At Transfiguration I saw a church he had helped bring back to life. A weave of catholic, evangelical, LGBTQ and more, serving the community, classical cello, guitar and percussion, outreach, hospitality, growth. The biggest brightest picture in the church was of his face, smiling a welcome to all who walked in.

Coming back here David had changed things with more catholic and more evangelical edges, encouraged people to see "ministry" as what they were doing, he empowered people to lead and to act. He used authority and he could get out of the way.

David was, and is, also broken, as many of us are. His facebook spoke of this.

FORGIVENESS

Redeemer has always been a bit averse to confessions in liturgy. I like confession!

It jolts me, in the privacy of public worship, to speak aloud words that tag the truth that I fall far short of worthiness to be in the kingdom of heaven.

Not confessing at all, or confessing too openly does not push you to go deep, to the hidden places, the secret corners of your inner life where the darkness pools and the germs breed. The seeds of evil, oh so quietly germinate.

Confessing comes, and it comes with real spiritual cost, it comes before forgiveness can happen.

Forgiveness isn't a cheery, "Oh, never mind! Forgive and forget!" or a simple, "Oh, come on! We all love you!"

Jesus, in the resurrection demonstration that God returns even to those who would kill him, or just stand by as it happened,,,,, Jesus returns with the skin of his face and head torn by thorns and broken with punches. He has holes where great iron nails were pounded through into wood. His back and sides are torn with whip lashes and a spear wound, big enough to put a fist into, punctures into his lung.

The resurrection was not pretty.

The resurrection has no pretence. Something horrible, ugly, cruel happened.

Those who cheered, those who hid, those who just watched, those who wept...all remembered.

Forgiveness is not about pretence or amnesia or cheery optimism.
Forgiveness is about truth.
Truth told openly.
Hidden lies, power mis-used, lives broken, trust betrayed.

To receive forgiveness we too need to put our finger in the nailed hand, our fist into the gashed and torn soft hole right into the lung.
And Jesus reaches into your torn soul, the rot of guilt, the harrowing of memory and shame and, forgiving, heals, and leaves the scars in place.

AND NOW...

We will not dismiss David from our memory.
We will remember him in truth.

We will remember this ghastly day. The hammer fall of truth and the pain each of us feels.
And we will remember the many months of David's ministry. All his gifts, his teachings, his love, his brightness and sparkle, his faithfulness and compassion, his challenges and his encouraging in faith.

We cannot reduce a child of God to someone who did nothing wrong, or to someone who did nothing right. He, like me, gets it right and gets it wrong. Like you....all of us.

David has sinned in such a way that, with great sadness and reluctance, the church has taken away his privilege to be a priest. This is a terrible ache. There is also someone, not here, who also carries a terrible ache, the one who David wronged.

So here we are. Shocked, saddened, blindsided or unsurprised.
Our work now is to learn to practice forgiveness being given and confession made.
Confession made and forgiveness being received.

We pray...."God, he's yours. Look after him and heal him. Heal those close to his heart who are hurt."
"God, we are yours. Look after us and heal us and teach us your forgiveness."
"God, listen to my silence and hear my shames and sorrows. Show me your forgiveness"
"God, hold my hand until, by coming to you for cleansing so often, I finally learn the way, and can let others walk this path in my heart."

And David ..now he is gone from us
Gather in all that was a blessing in his time with you
Let go of any darkness, but only when you really know what you are putting down.
Pray for him, his family, his future.
Cry for him or be angry at him, but only to let it all flow away.
Follow the pilgrim way...the long walk, always towards the cross, towards the empty tomb, towards the ascending God.