

## *Practical Reconciliation*

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023 - Matt 5:21-37)

It's all in the attitude.

Jesus reminds us that our negative attitudes are just as unhelpful as our actions, they are just as bad as if we actually acted on them.

He also reminds us of what is at the very heart of God – right relationship – reconciliation – good relationships with one another.

Paul points to this as well as he reminds a quarrelling community that they should stop and focus on the main game – allowing God to grow you into all you are called to be.

This morning I want to share with you the story of a film I saw this week – The Banshees of Inisherin – which I think illustrates the importance of reconciliation, the importance of having right attitudes to one another and clarity in those relationships. The film reveals the awful consequences when that goes awry in a disturbing and through provoking way. Hopefully in my summary I am not giving too many spoilers should you choose to see it.

This film is set in the 1920's in a small island village off the coast of mainland Ireland, where the Irish Civil War is taking place. You can see and hear the canons and explosions from the island and it forms a significant backdrop for the story. At one point a character says – it was easier when we were fighting the English, but now we are fighting each other. On the island of Inisherin live Padraic and Colm who have been lifelong friends. Neither have family, although Padraic has a sister Siobhan. Padraic is a cow farmer and Colm a musician – a fiddle player, they are in a sense chalk and cheese, but they have been friends forever. Each day at 2pm they go to the village pub for a pint of Guinness. One day Colm announces to Padraic that he doesn't want to be friends anymore. No explanation, just a clear statement. We learn later that Colm is having somewhat of a midlife crisis and is thinking about what legacy he will leave behind. He is starting to write some music called 'The Banshees of Inisherin' which he believes will be his legacy, as he thinks the only ones who leave a legacy are artists not people who are 'just nice'. Padraic is hurt and confused and assumes he has done something wrong – Colm tells him he has not done anything wrong, he just doesn't want to talk to him anymore. Padraic can't accept that so goes to great lengths to make it right, he is the 'nice' person. Colm tells him that if he continues to try and talk to him, he will begin a form of self-mutilation, which will stop him from being able to play the fiddle. Padraic doesn't want that and tries to stay away but can't. He befriends the 'village idiot' who tells him he would get more respect from Colm if he stood up for himself. He tries that and it in turn unleashes a tragic trail – Colm is no longer able to play the fiddle, the 'village idiot' who was being abused by his father suicides, Padraic's miniature donkey dies accidentally as a result of Colm's actions and we see Colm's residence on fire with Colm sitting inside. Colm escapes as Padraic who set the fire has left him an escape route and in the final scene we find them both on the shoreline – is reconciliation

possible? Colm makes the first move and apologises for the death of the donkey and basically suggests that it is time for the hostilities to cease, he looks across the sea and suggests that the war in Ireland will soon end. Padriac responds by saying that it will stop for a while and the hostilities will recommence. Is he talking about the war or their relationship? Perhaps there is no hope? He walks away but he does glance back – that leaves me with a sense of hope.

Early in the film, Mrs McCormick who portays the ‘Banhee’ predicts two deaths. And there are – the ‘village idiot’, the miniature donkey but does she also mean the death of a friendship?

So, there was much to ponder as I left this film. It is dark, but there are many moments of Irish humour that comes through, but more importantly it has much to say about the human character and spirit. One of the things that caught my eye visually was the prominence of a stone Celtic Cross in the middle of the town, the symbol for me of reconciliation.

Would it have been different if Colm had explained why he felt their friendship needed to end?

Would it have been different if all the characters could forgive themselves and each other?

Would it have been different if Padraic had respected Colm’s need for space? If he let his ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and his ‘no’ be ‘no’?

Would it have been different if all characters had not acted on their thoughts and instead found ways to accept their differences?

Would it have been different if Colm examined himself a bit more deeply and explored his own need to leave a legacy, the reasons for his melancholy, instead of perhaps shifting the blame for his inability to write his great work on Padraic?

Would it have been different if Padraic had looked a bit deeper and why he needed to be ‘liked’ by everyone?

Would it have been different if both Padraic and Colm had listened to the wise words of Siobhan?

Was reconciliation still possible as Padraic walks away but does glance back?

This simple story of a broken friendship takes a very tragic twist, just like what was happening on the Ireland mainland.

When we let our relationships and friendships fracture without both sides trying for some kind of reconciliation or truce (I am not saying we have to like each other, or that it

is easy, and I acknowledge it takes both sides) it will have tragic consequences. We have seen that time and time again in our world.

How we need to take on these learnings from Jesus, Padraic and Colm and Paul into our world. Into a world populated with conflict – Ukraine, Iran, Myanmar, Israel – where like in the film the consequences are tragic. We need to take these learnings into our nation as we think about the place and plight of our First Nations people. We need to take these learnings into our community as we pray young men will stop shooting one another. We need to take our learnings into our relationships of people of faith and respect different views. We need to take these learnings into our own lives as we think about our friends and families and our ongoing relationships with them.

I pray we will all be able to speak clearly, acknowledge the past, seek, give and receive forgiveness, celebrate difference, go to those we have hurt, live honest and peaceful lives as we live out the reconciliation that is at the core of our faith.