Reflection on Forgiveness

Have you ever fallen out with someone? A friend, a parent, a brother or sister? When that happens a hole seems to open up in the friendship and you become separated by a growing distance. You are filled with anger or resentment and feel that things are unfair. You are blocked and feel trapped. You can become bitter and unhappy. It is hardly a state of being that you want to stay in for very long.

Eventually we recognise that the only way forward is forgiveness. We realise that we need to ‘get over it’ and move beyond what has been done if we want to get back on good terms with that person. We need to have a change of heart.

How about being on the other side of that painful distance? Have you ever been forgiven? How did that make you feel? Did the distance just get smaller?

To be able to forgive others is a gift to ourselves! When we forgive we free ourselves. When we forgive others and forgive ourselves we shift into a newly created space that shines with compassion and mercy.

The story of The Prodigal Son in Luke 15 is the story of a forgiving father. The parable teaches us about the mercy and compassion of the father (God) who never gives up hope of seeing his selfish and sinful child (sinners). When the prodigal son returned home, all was forgiven, instantly, wholeheartedly.

The last section of the story is about the resentful older brother who could not understand why his father demonstrated such amazing love and compassion towards his little brother. After all, the older brother had been a good and faithful son. He had done nothing wrong! Why should his rebellious little brother get all the rewards?

The parable leaves the listeners with an open question. What would the older brother decide to do? He could choose to stay angry and resentful and trap himself in a space outside the warm family circle, or he could forgive, let go of his own feelings of hurt and injustice and join in the celebration to welcome his lost brother.

What would we do?

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is calling for a change of heart in us – to be loving and forgiving. God takes responsibility to find us and restore us. We simply need to accept being found. Even as he was dying on the cross his last words to the criminal hanging beside him contain total forgiveness: “I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23: 43).

As Christians we need to work every day on being forgiven and forgiving, and this is not easy! Through this parable Jesus wanted us to see the heart of God. To forgive is to come home to yourself – and to God, our father.