

“I Forgive Him!”

These words greeted us as we opened The Herald on Thursday 24 January.

The previous day the headline story was of a mob justice tragedy where an innocent man was accused of raping a child. The man was killed. As the story unfolded it was established that in fact the child had not been raped.

An innocent, family man was killed for something that never happened.

The reaction of the supposed victim's father and supportive mob was quick to judge and take vengeance, no doubt fuelled by the extreme prevalence of similar crimes and the ineffectiveness of relevant authorities in intervention.

Oh, the pain!

Of the child's family.

Of the deceased father's family!

Of the regrets by the child's father!!!

And then so very quickly we have the “I Forgive Him!” Many find this reactionary. Others celebrate its grace and wisdom.

Is the decision to forgive injustice to be celebrated or discouraged?

As Christians we believe that forgiveness is the oxygen of the Kingdom of God. We need it and exercise it as essentially part of our lives. This is so because it was so for Jesus, who prayed “Forgive them Father! They don't know what they are doing!” when he was dying on the cross.

We forgive because we have been forgiven!

The question is asked: How real can forgiveness be if offered so soon?

Our reality is that Jesus forgave while the injustice was still underway!

We do understand that Forgiveness is both a decision and a multi-layered process! The outworking of the decision may well involve many moments of deep emotion and subjective wrestling. Yet it remains by far the healthiest option.

As a nation, with our Truth and Reconciliation Commission experiences and the many other such commissions, including the current Zondo Commission with all the Bossasa revelations, we find ourselves called to work well with the best forgiveness wisdom we can find! The alternatives are just so destructive!

We need to be thinking about intention, motivation, outcome, and redemption. Just as in healthy family life discipline should always be aimed at redemption not retribution.

In any case, not to forgive is like drinking poison and hoping that the other person dies!

Forgiveness invites very positive outcomes such as:

- Truth
- Justice
- Transformation
- Reconciliation
- Maturity
- Peace

It does not hinder justice or consequences. It keeps the emphasis on hope even while the process is underway.

It carries the possible inspirational value for the culprits. At the least it demonstrates a way forward from jungle law to human respect.

Forgiveness saves us from vengefulness.

It leaves that to the greater wisdom of the God who knows the end from the beginning.

A faithful Christian leader and his wife suffered the deep pain and injustice of the murder of their son and daughter (aged 20 & 18 respectively).

These were lovely clean-living young people who were killed by a psychopathic man. The trial was fraught with compromises as it centred around the competencies or otherwise of the legal profession and resulted in the acquittal of the patently guilty man.

The most remarkable thing about this tragic event was the statement made by these deeply saddened parents that they forgive the perpetrator!

They declared their decision to forgive very soon after receiving the news. This attracted considerable debate among many and was explained as their commitment to leave vengeance to God while embracing the freedom which such Forgiveness brings.

They did this to avoid the poison of bitterness and retaliatory hatred, with the understanding that we are to “love sinners but hate the sin”.

Of course, such a decision, as they can testify, requires ever deepening processing at emotional levels, like layers of an onion.

All of this points to the following:

We need a flood of courageous forgiveness to heal the wounds of our nation!!!

Jesus empowers this.

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