Our theme today is **“restorative justice**”

In our gospel reading we can see Jesus giving an example of this.

One definition of “restorative justice” is that it refers to a way of responding to an offence or crime or other types of injustice or conflict, that focuses primarily on repairing the damage caused by the wrongful action and restoring insofar as possible the wrongdoing of all those involved as a contrast to simply punishing the offender.

Around the time of the reformation, Christians who disagreed on doctrine could end up in violent conflict. The rack or other types of torture were used to extract agreement or confessions.

In our times in some religious groups those who disagree with the leader or his doctrine are ostracised or forced to leave the community.

 Indeed, you could say that by following Jesus; a mark of Christianity as we know it, is that offenders are treated the way that Jesus treated tax collectors or gentiles.

Most commentators argue that this means that we should respect them as humans and care for them, and not shun them.

It does not mean that we allow all people to be leaders of our fellowship, but we do seek to include all people in our love and care.

By contrast a mark of a cult or sect is that those who disagree or hold other views are excluded and even denied access to family members.

***(Do you think that Jesus has in mind a brother who disagrees with accepted doctrine of the church or rather one who perhaps offends in a criminal or unethical manner against the church fellowship?)***

You probably noticed the report in the news this week of the horrific case of the man who drunkenly ran into a group of children and killed four of them in Sydney, 8 months ago. Three were from one family – a devout Christian family. The father was quoted as saying that: -

 “forgiveness goes hand in hand with justice”.

The family has said that they will not hate the accused man but rather forgive him. At the same time justice demands that he faces the consequences of his actions.

Love means that we want the best for others and that may mean a process of repentance and remorse and then rehabilitation.

Ultimately the Christian view is surely that the aim of all-inclusive love is that we end up reconciling with those that hurt us and restoring them to our community.

Often of course we may never physically see an offender again. We still have to deal with the hurt others cause.

A story that Lyn and I both read recently and that resonated with us was that of Rob Hunter. In February 1977, he was a young teacher at his first small one teacher school in Gippsland. On his ninth morning, there at playtime he and his nine students were kidnapped by an escaped prisoner who had already attempted the same crime a few years before. For 24 hours Rob, the kids and then six other adults were chained and driven along winding bush tracks to a remote hiding place. At all times their lives were in danger.

Last year, Rob wrote an account of that horrific time. At the end of the book he clearly attributes his healing and survival over the years to God’s grace and the healing power of forgiveness. He cannot approve or forget the despicable violation of the kidnapper but neither could he allow spite or anger to dominate his thinking over the years.

In the reading from Romans that we have also heard; Paul repeats the idea that to be in tune with God we need to treat others those we encounter and those we just hear about with unstinting love as much as possible.

While these readings deal with personal behaviour and relations, the Exodus reading deals with more community or national issues.

The Egyptians had invited the Israelites to live with them but then had changed their minds and some generations later enslaved and oppressed them.

The Passover story reminds us that God was righteously angry with the Egyptians for mistreating the Israelites and that He appointed Moses to lead His people to freedom.

This story has given hope to generations of oppressed people over the centuries.

 In our own lifetimes, we have seen the Civil rights movement in the USA, lead in the 1960’s by Rev Martin Luther King slowly advance the rights of black people there……..

 In South Africa the Truth and Reconciliation Commission lead by Archbishop Tutu has gradually brought some restorative justice to downtrodden people there.

In Europe, after two disastrous wars, in the 1950’s nations finally began to co-operate and find common solutions to their problems.

Here in Australia we are aware that much still needs to be done to address the issues of reconciliation and restorative justice for the indigenous people of this country.

***Can you think of other groups in our midst who may deserve liberation and justice.? How can we advance justice for those who still labour in slave like conditions?***

If the events of this year have shown us anything it is that we cannot afford to rest on past achievements. The challenges of loving and caring for and seeking justice for all peoples everywhere remain.