

**Reflection**

**Difference: The Power of Faith in a Conflicted World**

**Foreword***: The Diocese of Easton is partnering with the* [*Reconciling Leaders Network (RLN)*](https://difference.rln.global/about-rln) *to engage in the work of the Difference Movement and make the course accessible to our leadership, parishioners and communities. We are currently in the first phase of the partnership, identifying and enrolling individuals who would like to become certified trainers. These trainers will offer both a pilot course this winter and train additional people to become hosts (course leaders for the movement in their area). We hope to fully deploy the Difference Course around our Diocese beginning in Spring of 2021.*

**Three Pillars of the Difference Movement - Be Curious! Be Present! Reimagine!**

The Fundamental message promulgated in this movement is the overwhelming acknowledgement that all comes from God, who has settled the relationship between us and him and then calls us to settle our relationships with each other.

This call is at the center of our faith. The cross is the story of God's reconciling us to himself, healing what's breaking and calling us to be caught up in this work as well. And it's for this reason that both Archbishop Justin Welby and Presiding Bishop Michael Curry have made reconciliation one of their priorities. They both have a vision for the Church to be a reconciling presence in the midst of conflict. Justin Welby said, “to see this vision realized, we want to mobilize a generation to live out their calling as peacemakers and reconcilers so that we might see a just and flourishing society. There's nothing more personally exciting to me than seeing a movement of Christians flourish in this call to reconcile”. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry defines it as the work embodied in the [Habits of Grace](https://episcopalchurch.org/habits-of-grace).

Reconciling work of Jesus isn't just something that needs to be left to the experts; it's something that we can all step into in our everyday encounters. Difference is a movement that is based around our everyday discipleship, in a world that has become increasingly polarized. Instead of merely choosing to practice indifference or coexist in conflict with one another, we believe that a different way is possible. We want to explore what it means to follow Jesus in the face of conflict, and to invite God to be at work in our relationships on every level. It's our hope, through Difference, to share a framework and a language that helps us consider the practices that make this possible. As part of this movement, we will be offering the Difference course. This is for church-based groups to go a bit deeper in learning how we cross divides, disagree well, and practice forgiveness in our relationships. We'll be offering some training events in the late Fall/early Winter for those who would be interested in running the course in their own context. In the meantime, you are welcome to view [the webinar series](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuxTTtoZryclhwrS8FdKq_ueReuE7iUK8) offered by RLN.

We want to think about a dynamic of four relationships. It is about my reconciliation with God. As a person, I seek to be reconciled with God, to understand my identity in Christ. What I am about is being someone who is reconciled with myself. It’s about being reconciled with others, and it's about being reconciled with God's who created earth as God's creation. These relationships are interlinked, so it's not just like there’s one way; these things all have an impact on each other.

In becoming more reconciled people, Jesus calls Christians to be ‘reconciled reconcilers’, that is, only when we are reconciled first with our own self and others, we can then in turn become agents of reconciliation for a broken and hurting world. It is undergirded by Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s concept of UBUNTU – ‘I am because you are’ - my self-identity is informed by the next person’s self-identity. In Jesus’ words, he refers to it as, love your neighbor as yourself. When we are unable to love ourselves, it is virtually impossible to love the next person, because perfect love is a learned and practiced virtue that we gradually cultivate. Consider the loving relationship between husband and wife that is cultivated over a period of time eventually resembling the agape-God’s perfect love, a love borne out of faithfulness, sacrifice and common struggle.

My restored relationship with God has an impact on my view of myself. My relationship with creation speaks to my honoring God, glorifying of God. My treatment of others also impacts what's going on in me. We've got this deep linking of relationships, this web of relationships. When we're thinking about renewal and reconciliation, this interlinking is part of story. These things speak to one another, and I want us to just take a moment to reflect in order lift our minds a little bit.

Listen to this figurative language and think about what reconciliation could look like. This is from Isaiah 11: *“Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. …The infant will play near the Cobras den, and the young child will put its hand into a Viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy all on my holy mountain. So, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”*

We are created by God to be part of a web of relationships which are deeply connected to one another. In Jesus, and across these relationships, we are brought back into harmony with God. As Paul writes in Colossians 1: “*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities: all things have been created through him and for him. …For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross*”*.*

On the flip side of this, the relationship we have with God also shapes the relationship we have with others. There's really no option left open for us to keep our faith to ourselves. God is deeply connected in our encounters with others. We see how our relationship with God impacts our treatment of others in 1 John 4: 7, where it says: “*Dear friends, let us love one another, for this love comes from God.” Everyone who knows love has been born of God, knows God*.”

Henry Nouwen, a Dutch priest and theologian wrote: “Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the Beloved.” When we are reconciled with ourselves, we can nurture healing in others. A healthy and inspired acceptance of ourselves is powerful in enabling others to flourish. But we must say that by no means are we expecting perfect people and perfect days who act in perfect ways. I'm sure the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams had just this idea in mind with his description of perhaps one of the most famous reconcilers in the church: Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Rowan says: “When I think of people in my own life that I call holy, who have really made an impact …they make me feel that there is hope for my confused and compromised humanity. … Desmond Tutu manifestly loves being Desmond Tutu, there's no doubt about that. But the effect of that is not to make me feel frozen or shrunk; it makes me feel that just possibly, by God's infinite grace, I could one day love being Rowan Williams in the way that Desmond Tutu loves being Desmond Tutu.”

Henry Nouwen, as an author and as a man who understood what self-rejection felt like, said: “Nobody escapes being wounded. We are all wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not ‘How can we hide our wounds?’ so we don't have to be embarrassed, but ‘How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?’ When our wounds cease to be a source of shame and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.”

It's a very powerful phrase, the idea being a wounded healer. And the idea of coming to something fragile, coming to something not necessarily all bold and great, but being able to offer a hand of healing. I wonder if you've seen those moments where brokenness meets the brokenness of the world, this moment where God's Holy Spirit is there in conflicted moments, in these unlikely moments in relationships that would not be forged normally? In moments of brokenness meeting brokenness, there is real power given to the spirit within us. So, it behooves us to reflect on the way you relate to yourself and on how this connects to your relationships with others. I know I reflect a little bit on what you might be familiar with: the idea of ‘the imposter syndrome’ where you're just sort of faking it and waiting for everybody to catch you out and tell you that you shouldn't really be there. When I’m more conscious that I'm carrying that syndrome, I worry what does that say to other people around me. Looking at things through that lens is potentially also not honoring Christ and those other people with me.

My gracious counsel is to resist the temptation to hurt or defame someone through the various ways we may promulgate the practice. People’s lives and livelihood could be in jeopardy by our callous and uncaring actions, guard the tongue, pray for the persons and hold in check our actions through a conscious exercise of personal self-critique and self-interrogation.

God bless you and God bless our diocese!

Bishop San

P.S. *The Difference Initiative (RLN) is on the agenda of Lambeth Conference 2020 (now 2022) to be led by the very team pioneering it and which our diocese is working with to bring it virtually to the diocese. Also, the team introduced it at the Spring House of Bishops Meeting in March, 2020. It was there that I was introduced to it and followed up by joining the movement and participating in the four webinars in April and May.*