

**This is what we are about.
We plant seed that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our
capabilities.
We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in
that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very, very well.
It may be incomplete,
but it is a beginning,
a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter
and do the rest.**

Archbishop Oscar Romero, San Salvador

Quotes from 'A way of being Free' by Ben Okri ISBN 0753801418

'Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings.' (page 112)

'Stories, are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations.' (page 112)

"Blessed be the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." Matthew 5.9

I want to thank the Dean and Chapter of this Cathedral for welcoming to their Cathedral and the chance to meet up with Canon David Monteith again.

Thanks also to Jackie Duffy (whom I think many of you know) who despite having worked with me for some years in Northern Ireland, still thought of me as someone to preach on this important occasion in the life of the Irish Community here in Leicester.

St Patrick's day is one of Irelands best exports. Over this next week we are joining in a worldwide celebration of what it means to be Irish. Its a celebration of our culture, tradition, our values, our community. And at the heart of this service is the theme of Peace and the person of St Patrick and the stories of St Patrick can still have a great impact on our lives today.

Among the things we know about Patrick was that he wasn't Irish. But after a most traumatic experience, he chose not to get his own back on his enemies, not even to distance himself from them, but to live among them, and give his life to them and for them.

Patrick was captured and brought to Ireland as a slave. At that time he wasn't religious at all. But then something happened and his life was totally changed. This is how he wrote about it.

"After I had first come to Ireland it was my daily task to bring animals to pasture – a job which gave me the chance to pray a lot. And gradually my love for God, and reverence for him, got deeper and deeper."

It may have been loneliness, homesickness, or sheer despair that made him pray, but it changed his life. He eventually escaped and got back home to Britain. But then had a dream and heard the Irish people crying out to him, *"Holy boy come and walk among us once again."* And he did. He gave the rest of his life to the Irish because he loved God.

God's plan is a Peace Plan for all of creation. It's about reconciliation. Its about making enemies friends.

This is what God is doing in this world. Patrick was a child of God. He demonstrated the family likeness of God, he was a peacemaker.

You don't have to have red hair to be Irish, but you do have to be a peacemaker to be a child of God.

I believe this city of Leicester is now the first European city where to have a white skin means you are in the minority. The story of this city, a multi ethnic community resolving to live together in peace is a story that this world needs to hear. This is a peace mission which the Irish

There is good reason to reach out to the enemy, even to engage in the difficult task of finding ways in which we can love our enemy. Why? because the God who is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ is about making enemies friends. About reconciliation.

Jesus said, Blessed be the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.

© The Rt Revd Trevor Williams, Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe

One story which remains vividly etched in my mind was of a girl who was at Corrymeela on a cross community programme where they had been telling their stories and meeting for the first time in this way with members of the other community, sharing how they had been affected by the troubles. It was at the final worship and the person leading it simply asked if there was any situation or person we were concerned about, to simply mention it and the group could hold that concern for a moment in their prayer. A girl said, I would like you to pray for a man who is in prison tonight. He is worried and his wife and children are worried to, because tomorrow he returns to court to receive his sentence. And so the group of Catholics and Protestants prayed in silence for that man. Afterwards a Corrymeela staff member asked her, if you don't mind telling us who is it that you asked us to pray for? He is the man who murdered my Father.

There was somebody living out of a different story than the battle between them and us. She had found to an astonishing degree the ability to see a common humanity between herself and the person who had inflicted on her so much pain.

Just like Patrick. He need never have returned to Ireland. He had many reasons not to. But he reached across the barrier of difference, he reached out to his 'enemies' and met and lived with him, and as we know great transformation of the Ireland of his day was the result.

community is a part of, and will continue to have an important part to play.

Ben Okri the Nigerian writer has said,

'Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves.'

I worked in Northern Ireland for 32 years. Life in Northern Ireland is viewed as a contest between 'them' and 'us'. Catholic versus Protestant, Nationalist versus Unionists, Republican versus Loyalist. There is little 'common sense' between the two sides. Each side claims to know the 'true facts' of any situation. At the same time nobody can agree on what are the 'true facts'. Two histories exist, two sets of attitudes and prejudices, two loyalties, two cultures, two sets of tradition. The common factor is a deep-rooted fear of 'the other'. The differences between the two traditions are symbols of threat. Each new situation is interpreted to support the age old truths, the battle between 'them' and 'us'.

Due to segregated housing and schooling many people never meet those 'from the other side' during their formative years. So the other side can continue to be blamed for our troubles. Political compromise is suspect. Working together in Northern Ireland's Assembly is still proving very difficult indeed.

In the same essay Ben Okri says

'Stories, are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations.'

Change the story, change the individual, change the nation. That's the job for peacemakers.

Corrymeela is a community of Catholics and Protestants and it has been working for Reconciliation for over 40 years. The Corrymeela Centre at Ballycastle on the North Antrim coast exists to provide a safe place where people can meet from across the sectarian divide, where they share their story and in listening to the story of others to change by the formation of a new story.

Two classes, one from a Protestant school, and one from a Catholic school stayed at Corrymeela for three days. They spent time getting to know one another and building up some trust. Then they met in small groups to share their story. Four Catholics and Four Protestants were in each group. And then they were invited to share and listen carefully to what each had to say. The topic was how the troubles have affected my life.

One girl started. She said how her father had been killed because he was a member of the Police. She went on to say how her life was now. How every mealtime, dad's chair was empty, he wasn't there anymore, he was so missed at special times, birthdays and Christmas.

Then another girl told her story. How her brother was returning home and was picked on by a Loyalist gang and killed. In the end 6 out of 8 in

that small group told stories of grief through sectarian violence. Family members, friends, neighbours.

At the end of a very powerful session these young people rose and fell into each other's arms weeping. Catholics comforting Protestants and Protestants comforting Catholics.

Every grieving person needs to tell their story, over and over. But what was happening here was special. Because the story was being told into that community from which the perpetrator of their misery had come. It hadn't been made fun of, or argued against, but just heard.

And then hearing the other community tell their story, totally different in circumstance, but totally the same in its effect.

As personal stories are shared, the relationship between teller and hearer, hearer and teller is changed. When we confront the age-old myth we live by in Northern Ireland 'whatever you say say nothing' and share our experience, a new reality is created, a new story emerges a new truth is found. This doesn't dissolve our differences. What emerges is a new way of holding our differences, not as swords to wound but as pruning hooks to promote growth.

How did this work of reconciliation happen. It happened through providing a safe place to meet and share our story. It happened through giving hospitality to those who were different. Something as simple as holding out the hand in friendship.