There’s no such thing as silence. What we call silence is a selection of which noises we choose to hear. One of the joys of silent meditation is that we become aware of sounds that would usually be drowned or ignored.

In the same way there’s no such thing as peace, if peace is taken to mean the absence of conflict. There’s only the selection of which kinds of tensions, differences, and disputes we choose to regard as significant, and the degree to which they are harmonious, constructive, or suppressed. The cessation, resolution or more likely translation of one conflict simply creates time and space to become aware of others. When we regard a conflict as a waste of time or energy, it’s not because conflict itself is pointless; it’s because we believe this conflict in question is distracting us from conflicts elsewhere that are more urgent, significant, rewarding, or otherwise worthy of our attention. Reconciliation isn’t about replacing conflict with peace. It’s about the transfiguration of conflict into glory.

I once had a role that included overseeing a couple of dozen churches. I got a call from a vicar in distress asking me to come and chair an extraordinary congregational meeting in a church that was torn apart by strife in many ways but had finally chosen to have it out and shed blood over the stained glass windows. There were five arches at the east end of the sanctuary. Four contained Victorian stained glass that had been covered up during the thirties. The central arch was different. It had had an abstract coloured glass design installed in the 1950s. A few months before this crisis meeting, a couple of powerful characters had taken it upon themselves to uncover the four Victorian windows. The resulting five panels went together about as well as ice cream served with tomato ketchup. Civil war broke out among the congregation, and a special meeting was called.

The vicar was prepared to let the meeting run for only one hour. Perhaps he thought that would keep the level of emotion under control. If so, he was wrong. Influential protagonists gave opening seven-minute arguments for and against. You’d be amazed, but apparently the issue of non-matching stained glass windows had a bearing on everything from global poverty to world evangelism to climate change to arts opportunities in major cities. Leaving time for summing up, I had 30 minutes left for contributions from the floor. I asked how many people wished to speak. 15 hands were raised. I did the arithmetic and said it was therefore going to be two minutes each, no more, and we’d start with the person nearest the front and work our way back.

A 35-year-old woman began the debate. She had a sheaf of maybe 20 pages of handwritten text in her hands and there was no way 2 minutes was going to be enough for her. After a minute and three-quarters I told her she had 15 seconds left. She took no notice. She just spoke faster, and crashed through the time barrier with an ingratiating movement of the shoulders, a giggle and a flicker of the eyelashes. I said “It’s time to stop.” She continued, with a little laugh as if to say, “You can’t stop me if I’m so charming.” I said in a louder voice “I’m just going to talk over you so people can’t hear what you’re saying until you stop talking and sit down.” After 10 seconds of unequal struggle, she gave up.

Up stepped the second speaker. He spent his first minute and three-quarters telling us he’d been chair of this and major-general of the other. I said “You’ve got 15 seconds left.” He said “I’m not going to be told I can’t make my point by somebody who…” I said “It’s time to stop... And I’m going to talk over you as well until you let someone else speak.” After that people got the message. I formed an impression no one had stood up to these people for a generation or more. This was a group of people so locked into a cycle of bullying and manipulation that the whole church was being held to ransom. Here was a community where conflict had simmered for decades. The fight presented itself as being about worship and the beauty of holiness but it was really more about taste and power and having no confidence in the leadership and therefore bypassing due
procedure, and people coming to terms with having less influence in a congregation than they had at work or at home.

My story isn’t about Syria or Rwanda or Northern Ireland or South Africa. I offer it in all its bourgeois provinciality because I think it holds within it most of the themes this conference seeks to address, and highlights the kinds of responses conflict in the church tends to evoke. It’s the significance of those responses I want to talk about today.

My argument today comes in four parts. I want first to note the mood of conflict in the church and among Christians. The word I discern to identify that mood is exasperation. I then want to deepen the diagnosis of that mood. The word on which I focus that diagnosis is impatience. In the third part of my address I want to explore the theological issues behind that word, ‘exasperation.’ Finally I want to dig away at the theological questions that lie inside that term, ‘impatience.’

Exasperation

So I’m going to start with the word exasperation. Here we are, in the 21st century, and we’re still having to take three days out of our busy and important lives to talk about reconciliation. Hear the exasperation in that sentence. There are two kinds of exasperation.

Number one kind is a notion of progress. Of course Cain and Abel had their difficulties, but we’ve moved on since then. We have abundant economic resources; Cain and Abel had to choose between livestock and soil – but we can have both. We have breathtaking communications devices: there’s no need to be in any doubt about what was said, here or on the other side of the world; it can all be recorded and transmitted and proved and received within seconds. We have long-established political and legal procedures: if we’re not sure how to handle a new question, there are oceans of people happily employed to help us and advise us and show us and prepare us.

The one thing we don’t seem to have improved is other people. We ourselves are much improved, of course; we’ve read self-help books, we’ve recognized our tendency to be conflict-averse, we know all about assertiveness, we were brought up by parents who were much more in touch with their feelings than their own parents were, and we’ve had plenty of chance to tell therapists how cross we are with our parents despite their much-improved handling of our childhood. But other people seem to be just as exasperating as they ever were. All the fruits and momentum of human progress have gained compelling force in every other place: but in this person I’m in conflict with right now they seem to be entirely absent. This really is absurd.

At that debate about the stained-glass windows it was very difficult for anyone to maintain eye contact with their opponent for even a moment. Each speaker seemed to agree that it was simply too bad that people as dumb-headed as the other crowd even existed on the planet, let alone in the same congregation. That’s the first kind of exasperation.

Number two kind is a notion of salvation. Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard. When two or three are gathered, Jesus is in the midst of them. We are one body with many members. In other words, for Christian believers, Christ’s redemption has ended conflict with God and with one another. The war is over. To carry on fighting is as ridiculous and quaint as one of those Japanese soldiers found in the forests of Sumatra in the sixties who never got the message about Nagasaki and thought the Second World War was still going on. Christ’s salvation is secured, and the only tasks remaining are to spread the good news and deal with the sticky problem of oil on the beard.

The one thing we don’t seem to have improved is other people. We ourselves are much improved, of course; we’ve read self-help books, we’ve recognized our tendency to be conflict-averse, we know all about assertiveness, we were brought up by parents who were much more in tune with their own parents were, and we’ve had plenty of chance to tell therapists how cross we are with our parents despite their much-improved handling of our childhood. But other people seem to be just as exasperating as they ever were. All the fruits and momentum of human progress have gained compelling force in every other place: but in this person I’m in conflict with right now they seem to be entirely absent. This really is absurd. At that debate about the stained-glass windows it was very difficult for anyone to maintain eye contact with their opponent for even a moment. Each speaker seemed to agree that it was simply too bad that people as dumb-headed as the other crowd even existed on the planet, let alone in the same congregation. That’s the first kind of exasperation.

Number two kind is a notion of salvation. Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard. When two or three are gathered, Jesus is in the midst of them. We are one body with many members. In other words, for Christian believers, Christ’s redemption has ended conflict with God and with one another. The war is over. To carry on fighting is as ridiculous and quaint as one of those Japanese soldiers found in the forests of Sumatra in the sixties who never got the message about Nagasaki and thought the Second World War was still going on. Christ’s salvation is secured, and the only tasks remaining are to spread the good news and deal with the sticky problem of oil on the beard.

Thus if all were faithful, and simply accepted the good news of Christ’s salvation, there would be no conflict. Again, conflict is exasperating. Either my opponent must be stupid, and not grasp the good news, failing to realize that I’m its messenger; or my adversary must be perverse, as if the Japanese soldier knew the war was over but just decided to keep on fighting anyway. And this latter moment, the point at which I assume my adversary to be perverse, is a point of great danger, because it legitimises demonisation and induces an atmosphere in which quickly the only way to
limit the damage my adversary can do seems to be the use of force. Christ’s achievement of peace suddenly becomes a pretext for compulsion, because the opponent is either too ignorant or stupid to understand peace or too perverse or evil to accede to it. When the first speaker in the windows debate giggled and wriggled her shoulders, and when the major-general listed all his previous triumphs, I took it that in different ways both were expressing dismay that they had to put their argument into words, because surely it should go without saying.

For these reasons Christians face conflict inside and outside the church in a mood of exasperation. It’s something that simply should not be. There’s a story about a Russian train that ground to a halt on a snowy night in a forest. All the famous leaders of the twentieth century were on board. Lenin went forward to the cabin to re-educate the driver. The train remained stationary. Stalin went forward and shot the driver. Still the train did not move. Finally Brezhnev went through the train closing all the curtains and telling the passengers the train was moving. It’s not a bad parable of how Christians deal with conflict. Some concentrate on education and persuasion; others use force; others again resort to denial. What they all share is fury that the train isn’t moving – a fury that I’m calling exasperation – and an assumption that the problem isn’t really down to the train, but to the other people on it.

**Impatience**

And so to impatience. If exasperation comes from thinking the conflict is ridiculous, impatience arises from inferring the conflict is wasteful. The kingdom may not have definitively come in wind and fire with Christ’s return on the clouds of heaven in quite the way many members of the early church anticipated, but one thing that hasn’t changed since the first century is the sense of urgency held by Jesus’ followers. People may disagree about the rights and wrongs of issues and questions; they may have different understandings of points of principle and points of no return; they may have varied perceptions of shame and humiliation and disgrace and abhorrence; but what they can all agree on is that their opponent has dragged them into a fight that has brought an unconscionable dissipation of time and resources, has dragged them off the certain course they were previously on, and has left an ever-mounting agenda of items that will perhaps now never receive the attention they deserve.

It goes without saying that this form of impatience creates a vicious circle: the more wasteful you sense the conflict is becoming, the less energy you have to take any serious time over it; the less serious time you give it, the more likely you are to make moves that inflame the conflict or miss opportunities to downscale it; and thus the more intense the conflict becomes, with an attendant consumption of time and resources. In the great stained-glass debate, everyone without exception took this view: the people on the other side were grossly wasteful, either by neglecting the glories of Victoriana, or by dissipating the insight of the post-war vision. The sentiment that the money wasted on the debate should go to alleviate global poverty drew applause from both sides.

Let’s explore this mindset of impatience a little more closely. It makes two fundamental assumptions. Assumption number one is that resources and time are in short supply. This is certainly the language of the market. The market depends on creating the notion of scarcity, so that consumers will commit to an ever-higher price for goods that seem quicker, better, finer, stronger, slicker, safer. But the kingdom of God is not the market. In the kingdom of God, God gives disciples everything they need to do the work God calls them to do. Happiness in the kingdom of God is about learning to love the things that are not in short supply – like the fruits of the Spirit. What are these things that are so needy and so urgent that we are so impatient to get to them, and haven’t the time or resources to be delayed by tiresome and distracting conflicts? Aren’t we really saying, ‘I’m fed up of this conflict that I unaccountably don’t seem to be winning and I want to release more time to focus on conflicts where I have more confidence that I do seem to be winning’?

Assumption number two is that God’s work of redemption is somehow incomplete, that there was something God was either too busy, or too forgetful, or in too much of a hurry to do, or in some
other way constrained from getting done in Jesus. This would mean we really would be in a hurry, because God would be relying on us to complete the work of salvation, and there wouldn’t be a moment to lose. Or is the issue that we alone have the knowledge and ability to fulfill the vocation of bearing Christ’s mission, and this paltry conflict is an insult to our agenda because there is work that only we can do and now we may never do it, or have time to do it properly?

In other words, lurking behind this sense of impatience, is there either rather too little faith in God, and the comprehensiveness and completeness of God’s work of salvation, or rather too much faith in ourselves, and our indispensability to the fulfillment of God’s mission? Could it possibly be that when we examine this impatience closely, what we find is that this impatience isn’t impatience with sin, but impatience with God and the world for not being conformed to our desires?

Leaving aside for a moment the precise diagnoses, I trust I have made the case that our experience of conflict is invariably one of exasperation and impatience: exasperation, because the parties to the conflict, along with reconcilers, tend to be of the view that if all were faithful, there would be no conflict; thus the enemy must be either stupid or perverse; and impatience, because all sides, and observers, lament that this conflict is taking up huge amounts of energy and delaying the work of the kingdom that is the true call of discipleship. Now I’d like to explore further the truth of those judgements.

**Difference**

What I’m going to do in this part of my argument is to ground what I’m saying in perhaps the three most decisive parts of the Christian story: creation, salvation, and eternal life. What I want to emphasize is that the question we’re talking about today is at the heart of all things, and impossible to disentangle from God’s way of being with the world, yesterday, today, and forever.

I’m going to start with the notion of difference. Here let me make three very simple, yet easily neglected, claims. Here’s the first claim. Creation is, by its very nature, the inception of difference. God is pure essence; but when that essence is translated, by a process we call creation, into time-bound and contingent existence, then out of nothing comes diversity. And once we have the dynamic that underwrites everything that follows: will that diversity be harmonious – will that difference of creatures from God and one another issue in joy – or will there be tension, conflict, disharmony, and discord?

There are two rival answers to that question. One is, tension and conflict inevitably arise from difference; and because difference obviously can’t be eradicated, authority emerges to limit the dominance of the weak by the strong, to arbitrate between rival claims, and to police rules of fairness and equality. The other answer is, creation is a symphony, and even though more than one instrument is likely to be playing at any one time, and by no means always playing the same notes, that’s how symphonies work, and the point of creation is to enjoy the different instruments and melodies enhancing and augmenting and bringing the best out of each other.

Notice the way these answers assume alternative views of flourishing. For the first answer, other beings are fundamentally an obstacle and a threat to our own flourishing, and order is required to ensure they don’t inhibit our wellbeing inordinately. There’s no explicit understanding of what constitutes flourishing, but a perpetual anxiety about being constrained and limited. For the second answer, flourishing means the harmonious development of beauty in interactive partnership with the complementary gifts of other beings; far from being always potential inhibitors of our wellbeing, other creatures are inherent to its expression, and there’s no flourishing without them.

Notice also that for the first model there’s every hope and reasonable expectation that humanity should be able to arrive at a set of rational and sustainable laws and guidelines that should govern and ensure just interaction in this and every age. For the second model, by contrast, there will never be a set of sustainable laws; all one can aspire to is a set of skills by which all parties seek to improvise in ever-new circumstances as creation takes on ever-new configurations. What this
means is that those who uphold the first model will constantly be exasperated by failures in the system that lead to one party seeming to undertake an unfair action or maintain an unreasonable position, and the recourse will almost inevitably be to law as an even-handed mechanism for resolving disputes and reasserting a balance of power, followed by force to back up that law. By contrast for those who assume the second model, there is no impartial equilibrium, and there is no aspiration to restore a past moment of balance and stillness: all is flux, and the skill is to take the energy generated by difference and seek to make that energy as constructive and its clashes as positive as possible.

One way to illuminate this distinction is to distinguish between construction and horticulture. That which is built begins immediately to decay; the effort is to keep it as much as possible like it was on the day it was completed, and other buildings are more likely to be a threat than an asset. This resembles the first model. By contrast, that which is planted begins immediately to grow; the effort is to prune and steer in such a way that maximizes growth and interaction with the rest of the garden. To imagine returning to the moment before it was planted is out of the question; meanwhile it needs other vegetation to flourish. An understanding of difference sits much more easily with the horticultural metaphor; coping with conflict is much more like tending a garden than like restoring a set of buildings to their pristine condition.

Let me move to my second fundamental, but easily overlooked, claim. Heaven is the perfection of difference. Let’s tease out the significance of this apparently innocent assertion. Heaven is not a static freeze-frame of ecstatic or euphoric stillness: it’s a dynamic interaction of God, redeemed creatures, and the renewed creation, in which there’s partnership without pain and expression without envy. It’s not the absorption of all difference into the infinite, or the reversal of creation by the assertion of God alone, or essence without existence. In heaven, God, humanity, and the renewed creation continue to interact with one another, but this interaction issues in continuous iterations of ceaselessly-new fruits. There’s change, but no death, growth, but no loss, creativity, but no suffering.

See how this claim highlights the assertions we’ve already made. Heaven is a place of abundance and not scarcity. There’s no hurry, because it’s eternity. There’s no necessity for any individual to get anything done against any kind of deadline or in response to any kind of need – only benefit for everyone from each person fulfilling their God-given role in the orchestra. And note most significantly, heaven is not a set of roles carried out within timeless rules, but an ever-growing, never-repeating, constantly improvising, emerging relationship in which every gesture changes the template and every intervention creates new and unlimited possibilities and configurations. In other words, reconciliation is not the restoration of an untroubled condition before a conflict; it’s the creation of something that might never have been without that conflict.

And so to my third claim, which arises from the first two. Between creation and eschaton, or heaven as I’m calling it, lies the story of God. And the story of God is, from beginning to end, and at every moment along the way, a story of tension and conflict. In Genesis 3 God says to Adam and Eve, ‘Where are you?’ And in Genesis 4 God says to Cain, ‘Where is your brother?’ And God keeps asking Israel these same two questions throughout the Old Testament; and has been asking us the same two questions ever since. ‘Where are you?’ and ‘Where is your brother?’ – questions that name the conflict between humanity and God and between humans and one another. In Egypt Israel discovers what it means to be at enmity with an oppressor, and to find itself in slavery; in Babylon Israel appreciates what it’s like to have wandered far from God, and to find itself in exile. In the exodus we see God’s liberating will and power in parting the Red Sea; on Sinai we see God’s covenanted purpose in shaping ways for Israel to keep its freedom.

At every stage, there’s conflict. One can portray Israel – and Jesus’ disciples, correspondingly – as fragile, foolish, and faithless; but that would be to miss the point, that at every stage salvation is contested, and emerges out of setback, suffering, and fierce debate. God’s way of salvation is not to obliterate controversy and replace it with simple accord; it’s to take failure and turn it into the opportunity for discovery, transformation, intimacy, and hope. There’d be no Old Testament without Egypt and Babylon; there’d be no New Testament without the cross. If you see conflict and
tension as a source largely of exasperation and impatience, you’re missing out on the Bible, the gospel, and the church. Good luck with what’s left.

Gospel

And so to the final stage of my argument. Despite all this exasperation and impatience, we’ve gathered here in large numbers to spend three days talking about reconciliation. Even though we do so in a mood of exasperation and impatience. Why? Presumably because we really care about the gospel and the kingdom of God, and we’ll do whatever it takes to get to the place where we can wholeheartedly share the gospel and dwell in the kingdom of God, and all our work in reconciliation is a humble and self-denying precursor to that wondrous ministry and mission. Right?

Wrong. Here’s what my whole argument has been building up to. Far from being an essential, tiresome, and time-consuming precursor to the gospel, reconciliation is the gospel. There isn’t anything more important to which reconciliation is but the prologue. We haven’t gathered for these three days to do preparatory work for the life of the kingdom of God; we’ve gathered to live the kingdom of God – to marinade in it, if we like culinary metaphors.

It all gets back to one of the most fundamental theological questions of them all, which is this. Did Jesus come in response to the fall, as an agent to do the work of restoring our relationship with God – and thus was his saving work, his passion, death and resurrection a device to rectify that relationship and secure forgiveness and eternal life? Or was the coming of God written into the DNA of creation, because of God’s primordial and eternal decision never to be except to be with us in Christ? If you take the first view, then Christ’s saving work is a ladder both we and God ultimately kick away because the whole point is the restored relationship; for both parties the moment will eventually come when the historical events of the gospels are all very long time ago and, profoundly grateful for them as we will always be, they will be displaced by happier, more blissful, and more seamless joys.

But if you take the second view, that the coming of God was always going to happen, regardless of whether or not there was a fall, because of God’s decision never to be except to be with us in Christ, then Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection aren’t a means to an end: they’re the revelation of the truth about us and the truth about God. And the truth about what happens when we and God get as close as God always destined for us to be. In other words the tension and conflict we see in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus aren’t a mechanism to bring about the kingdom of God: they are the kingdom of God. There is no God lurking beyond Christ’s passion to which Christ’s passion is but an entry ticket. This is our God – constantly vulnerable to our rejection, embodying agonising love, and yet never letting that suffering have the last word. And there’s no sublime pacific ocean of repose beyond the glory of resurrection: there’s only the breaking-through of wondrous love amid the scars and hurts of painful conflict.

Most of all, there’s no gospel to which Christ’s passion, death and resurrection are the precursor: Christ’s passion, death and resurrection are the gospel. We don’t believe in the God of Jesus Christ because we want forgiveness and eternal life and Jesus is the best route to both. We believe because we are drawn into the mystery of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, and find in that story all the truth we can imagine about who God is and who we are. It’s not a stepping-stone: it’s all there is.

Think about Mary clinging to Jesus in the garden outside the empty tomb. She wants to believe the resurrection is now the whole of reality, that pain and grief and death and suffering and loss and anger and misery are over and she can be in the arms of the risen Lord forever. Who can blame her? But it’s not so. What’s happened has confirmed how things will finally be – sin and death will not have the last word. But tension and conflict will be around a long while yet, and the kingdom of God will appear amid this tension and conflict, not after they’ve been resolved or when they’ve been averted. The Old Testament is arguably about two journeys – of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land and of Judah from Babylon back to Jerusalem. But the irony and paradox of the
Old Testament, on which the New Testament is founded, is that the people of God were as close or even closer to God in the wilderness as they were in the Promised Land and saw God’s heart more truly in exile than they did on their return. Faith is not the solution of a problem but the entering of a mystery.

The work of reconciliation is not about offering techniques and best practice and facilitation and listening skills and procedures to take people out of the wilderness and exile and bringing them to the Promised Land and the rebuilt Jerusalem. Neither is it about both parties coming to realise that the conflict is ridiculous and the issue isn’t worth fighting over and they’d be much better off getting on with their regular lives and forgetting about it. The work of reconciliation is about recognising that when God and humanity came face to face, the cross was the result, and about believing that, just as God brought glory out of the cross, God will bring transfiguration when energies that are arrayed against one another are gradually, often painfully, and always wondrously realigned to create dynamism and new life.

If for a moment we set aside our exasperation and impatience, what do we see? Think again about the infuriating story about the stained-glass windows. What’s really going on? The people obsessed about 1950s glass design see it as a symbol of the fresh air that came into the whole church in the fifties, of social justice, global awareness, and the beginnings of a post-imperial post-pietist sense of holiness. They had great hopes for the new vicar but those hopes disintegrated in petty administrative failures and relational fragilities. The people fixated on the Victorian windows are pining for a stable, ordered society that’s gone away, for church and nation in harmony, for arts and faith to sing together once more, for a common life that’s not dominated by invasive transport and interfering technology. Only if you hear out these stories do you get to the point of repentance where can people acknowledge their demeaning remarks and underhand stitch-ups and small-minded accusations.

And only now, with truth in one hand and repentance in the other, can we begin to see that Christ died for this, for this mundane congregation with its bourgeois battle about windows, because this battle about windows is really a struggle for faith and relevance and meaning and impact and hope and trust and discipleship and grief and mission and beauty and longing. This is the moment when we need to ask both parties for some gesture of penance, some sign that acknowledges one another’s wounds and integrity. Only at this point – and it requires us to set aside impatience and exasperation and exercise all our time and courage and wisdom and perseverance to get to this point – only at this point can we hope to glimpse some forgiveness, and inch toward something like reconciliation; and only when the dust has begun to settle on reconciliation can we start looking for healing.

And yet we moan to our wise counselor, our district superintendent perhaps, or our archdeacon, that this windows story is ridiculous and exasperating and wasting way too much of our time. But our archdeacon gently says to us, ‘Tell me what it’s about.’ And we say ‘It’s about 1950s snobs and Victorian antiquarians.’ And our archdeacon says, ‘Tell me what it’s really about.’ And we say, ‘It’s about faith and relevance and meaning and impact and hope and trust.’ And our archdeacon leaves a silence, and says, ‘Anything else?’ And we say, ‘It’s about discipleship and grief and mission and beauty and longing.’ And our archdeacon leaves an even longer silence, and says, ‘And you’re telling me that you’ve got more important things to worry about than those.’

And we say, ‘But this church is crucifying me.’ And our archdeacon tenderly says, ‘No, it may feel like that. But really, this church is crucifying Jesus. All churches do. Your choice is whether you’re going to impose or pretend a false peace because you think you’ve got more important things to do, which really means more winnable battles to fight elsewhere, or if you’re going to get stuck into the hassle and hustle of truth-telling, repentance, penance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing. Which one do you think looks more like the cross?’ And at this juncture we mutter a short, Germanic, guttural word – which is exasperated code for saying, ‘Ok, I get it, you’re telling me it’s all about Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection. You’re telling me we never get bigger than the cross. I somehow got into thinking I was beyond that. Hmmm.”
Conclusion

Peace isn’t the absence of conflict, but the transformation from destructive tension into dynamic creativity, the turning of the competition that presupposes scarcity into the complementarity that assumes abundance, the emergence of thankfulness in place of resentment, and the retelling of a story that ceases to believe stray elements can or should be written out of the script. Jesus’ path to resurrection lay through the cross, and our path is the same. What the scriptures teach us is that we can often be closer to the mystery of God in times of wilderness and exile than in the much-longed-for destination, and that Jesus’ cross ultimately delivers us from the worst effects of our own.

The bad news is that there’s no kingdom to which reconciliation is a precursor. The good news is that reconciliation is the gospel. Every kind of ministry is ultimately a ministry of reconciliation, and, when we carry the cross of reconciliation, we find the weight of glory is ultimately Christ’s alone.