

Dear Friends,

Once Upon a Time, there was a great king, renowned for his wisdom and strength, who ruled over a mighty kingdom. His dominion stretched far and wide, and most regions within his kingdom readily submitted to his authority, acknowledging his power and justice. However, there existed a distant province, remote and resolute, that refused to yield to the king's rule.

Time and again, the king sent warnings to this far-off province, urging its inhabitants to lay down their arms and accept his sovereignty. Yet, each warning was met with stubborn resistance. The province continued to ignore the king's entreaties, standing firm in its rebellion. Determined to resolve the conflict without needless bloodshed, the king decided to make a final, gracious gesture.

He sent his own son, a prince noble in character and beloved throughout the kingdom, to deliver a message of mercy. The prince's mission was clear: offer peace to the rebels on the king's behalf. If they willingly surrendered and submitted, the king would pardon their wrongdoing and welcome them back into the fold.

Upon arriving in the rebellious province, the prince presented the king's offer with sincerity and hope. Tragically, instead of accepting mercy, the inhabitants responded with renewed hostility. Fresh fighting broke out, and, in the midst of the chaos, the king's son was murdered.

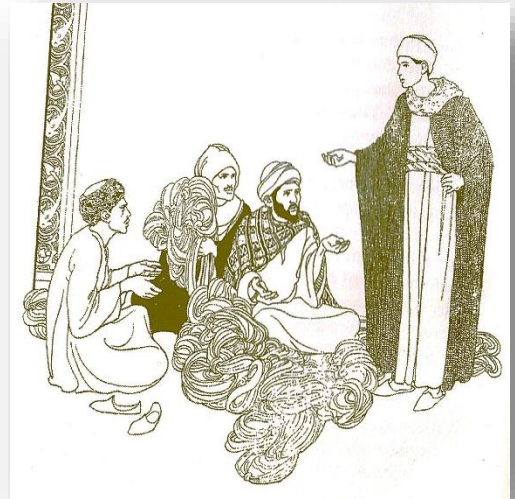
In his final moments, rather than cursing those who wronged him or seeking vengeance, the prince sent a message home to his father. He pleaded that his death might be counted as their death, and requested that, for his sake, forgiveness would be extended to all those who chose to submit to the king. He wished that his sacrifice would not be in vain, and that reconciliation would be possible for even the most stubborn rebels.

The king, grieving for his son yet moved by his son's extraordinary mercy, agreed to honour his request. Out of great love for his son, the king resolved that forgiveness and reconciliation would indeed be offered to all those who submitted in the prince's name. He would not let his son's sacrifice amount to nothing. To fulfil this promise, the king sent a messenger to the province, inviting the rebels to journey to the capital city. There, they would hear the king's decision face-to-face: anyone who chose to submit would be forgiven, and their past rebellion would be forgotten. Furthermore, those who accepted the king's mercy would be sent back as ambassadors, entrusted with the task of persuading others to submit and experience the king's gracious rule.

Thus, the story of the merciful king and his sacrificial son became a testament to the power of forgiveness and the possibility of reconciliation. It reminded all within the kingdom that mercy triumphs over judgement, and that the greatest victories are those won through compassion and love.

As I tell this story, with its origins partly in a story-parable missionary artist Lilius Trotter once told, I am reminded that I would be leaving Gloucestershire for pastures new at this time of year, with all the upheaval that would normally ensue, until a recent decision was reversed after months of uncertainty. I am grateful for each of our church families thoughts and prayers which I have been told about, and look forward to a few weeks summer break refreshed for the new connexional year ahead.

As it was put to me by a family friend from my youth, Dot Twivey of Exeter, in a Bible she gave me when I turned 21, "Striving together for the faith of the Gospel." Let us continue to press on toward that goal.



Rev John