

Script Session #2: Violence and Forgiveness

Speaker: Lloyd Bruce

After 9 years of being in the prison on a daily basis, I don't think I've learned so much about violence and forgiveness as I have learned about what it's like to be human. One of the things I used to see on a daily basis, when sitting with guys, the journey to accept the mess of who they were. That journey was the coming to terms with the pain that had been done to them and the pain that they had done to others. If they're violent, that's what violence is, the violence that creates within us, and gets lived out in the course of some of the horrible despicable things that people do. I think that's the humanness that this is who we are, as fragile, as broken, as shame filled.

Probably the greatest gift we can give to somebody, and forgiveness is a big word. I had a conversation with a colleague the other day, knowing that I'm going up to Atlantic next week. One of the individuals that Justin killed is a really good friend of mine. I've struggled with what it would look like if I saw him in the course of my visit at Atlantic Institute. I know I'm not at the place of forgiveness, not even close to being there. If I've learned anything in 9 years of walking the hallowed halls of Springhill Institute, I've learned that he's no different than I am. Its not that phrase "There but for the grace of God go I", that just doesn't work for me, never has. I go back to the phrase that Charlie Taylor was often quoted saying, "We're more alike that we are different". Like Justin I had the same capacity for violence and brokenness, we all do. If we're really prepared to admit the humanity of who we are, we all have the capacity to do horrible things.

So what would it look like if I met Justin at Atlantic? I don't know. I don't think I'd turn my back on him. I certainly wouldn't say I forgive him. Could we co-exist in the same space? Could we sit in the chapel together? Of course we could. What allows us to sit in the same space is the recognition for, in the core of who I am, that he is no different than I, a human struggling with all the challenges of daily living, who unfortunately chose to do some terrible things.

(Janice asks: In your own theology and in your own sense of God, what has changed most for you?)

I used to think I had it all pinned down. Now, it's not even mystery for me anymore, it's uncertainty, what it is to just appreciate the uncertain randomness that is living. Somehow in the uncertainty, in the randomness, I've come to this place of understanding, that in the space between the relationships that we share, that's where the Holy is present. So I go back to what would be a holy moment. Would I ever be able to be in that place if I met Justin in Atlantic, to be vulnerable, to say "it's hard for me to be in this room, it's hard to have read the accounts of what happened and how you have killed one of my best friends"? Something tells me that if I had the courage to be in that vulnerable situation, that maybe God might be present in that conversation.