

Forgiveness Beyond Failure

Luke 22:54-62

Good Friday

22nd April 2011

Do you know what the Indian expression *Kanjus Makkhichus* means? Or the word in Malay *gigi rongak*? Or how about the Hindi word *nakkele* or the German word *Kummerspeck*?

In a recent book entitled *The Meaning of Tingo*, Adam Jacot de Boinod looks at words from different languages around the world that have been coined to express something concisely that would otherwise take too many words to say. Thus the Indian *Kanjus Makkhichus* is used to describe someone who is so cheap that if a fly were to fall into their tea they would fish it out and suck it dry before throwing it away. People in Malaysia use the expression *gigi rongak* to describe “someone who has a space between their front teeth”. In Hindi, the word *nakkele* is “a person who, after a meal, licks whatever the food has been served on.” While the Germans have coined the word *Kummerspeck* which literally means “grief bacon – the excess weight gained from overeating because you are upset about something.”

De Boinod has uncovered a whole host of other wonderful expressions. For instance, the Norwegians have the word *Sjostygg* to describe someone who is so ugly the tide refuses to come in if they stand on the shore. A *bakku-shan* in certain areas of Japan signifies “a girl who appears pretty from the back but not from the front”. *Drachenfutter* in German, literally translated as “dragon fodder”, means “the peace offerings made by guilty husbands to their wives”. And, again in German, *die beleidigte Leberwurst spielen* describes the act of sticking out one’s lower lip out in a sulk (literally, “to play the insulted liver sausage”). The Dutch, says De Boino, also have some interesting words one of which is *uitwaaien* which means “walking in windy weather for fun” while the word *tingo* comes from the Pascuense language of Easter Island meaning “to borrow objects from a friend’s house, one by one, until there’s nothing left”.¹

The English language, not to be outdone, also has some very pithy words that have been coined to describe particular situations or people or to fit the changing times in which we live. There is, for instance, the word that I heard being used at a Session meeting one night *voluntold* – when no-one volunteers for a job and a person is then informed that they have been volunteered whether they like it or not. Or, how about “shopgrifting” – that is buying something, using it and then returning it for a full refund. Or, how about “potscaping”? That is landscaping your driveway with potted plants. Then there is the word “obesogenic”- an environment which

is conducive to obesity because there is a plethora of fast food outlets, reliance on cars, and offers which entice us to eat larger portions.²

One new word I find most amusing is the one baseball player, Roger Clemens, used when testifying before Congress a few years ago: *misremember*. When it was alleged that he had used performance-enhancing drugs he didn’t say that his accuser had forgotten or fabricated their conversation. Simply that he had misremembered it.³ And since then the word has been used by many people appearing before enquiries or in court. If they are faced with something that they are purported to have said some time ago and then have changed their story, they simply claim that they have “misremembered”.

Misremember. That’s a good word to use when the occasion demands. It can, for instance, get us men out of a lot of trouble. “Why didn’t you get milk at the store? Wasn’t it the last thing I told you before you left the house?” our wife might ask, “No, no, dear, you didn’t. You must have misremembered.” Or, when the police constable comes to the door and alleges someone saw our car leaving the scene of the crime, “I’m sorry, officer. I was nowhere near that part of town. Your witness must have misremembered.” Or, when the bank manager calls in our loan, “Pay you back \$10,000? What \$10,000? You never gave me that money. You must have misremembered.”

Misremember. Isn’t that exactly what Peter, the disciple, said the servant girl had done that night in the High Priest’s courtyard just after Jesus’ arrest? A fire had been lit and a number of people had gathered there awaiting news of what was to happen to Jesus. They were all chatting, sharing their ideas and opinions when a stranger in a cloak furtively slipped among them. The young woman saw Peter trying to blend in and immediately spoke up, “This man was with Jesus.” And when Peter denied it she didn’t back off but kept repeating it again and again, like a heckler at a political rally. “He’s one of them. He’s a follower of this man who’s on trial. I know for sure. You just have to listen to his accent.”⁴ But despite what she says, Peter continues his protestations. No. She’s wrong. She must have misremembered.

At that very point, there takes place perhaps the most poignant moment in the whole of the passion narrative. Peter hears the cock crow and simultaneously, almost, comes face to face with Jesus being led out of the palace courtyard. And as time stands still, he realises the awful significance of what he has done. Jesus trusted

Peter as his right hand man. He was the Rock on which Jesus was to build his church.⁵ And yet he had failed his Lord abysmally.

Now, this might well have simply been a story that ended in sorrow and despair with Peter following in Judas's footsteps. But, of course, we know only too well that things ended much differently. For Peter, there was courage beyond collapse. There was forgiveness beyond failure. There was renewal beyond ruin.

And this all came about because the Big Fisherman's heart and mind were touched by what happened on Calvary on Good Friday – events that Peter may have observed from afar but still had a momentous impact on his life. In Christ's death, he discovered that his sin had been blotted out, his failure had been consigned to history and his weakness had been replaced with a new strength. Amazingly, he found that he had been enabled by what happened on the Cross to serve Christ in new and exciting ways – ways, of course, that he had at that time still fully to understand.

And, of course, his forgiveness and empowerment was sealed and confirmed by what happened in due course after the Resurrection when Christ returned, met the disciples by the lakeside, and said specifically to Peter "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" to which Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."⁶ It was, of course, a question and answer that was repeated three times, almost as if to parallel the three times that Peter had denied Jesus, and to emphasise that he had been forgiven and reconciled to Christ despite his weakness and failing.

One of the most significant aspects of this whole episode of Peter's denial is only truly realised when we consider the source. The Gospel writer, Luke, got this story from Mark who seems to be relating the narrative as an independent observer of these events. But that's not so. There is only one possible source for this story and it's Peter himself. Remember, of course, that Mark's Gospel was the earliest Gospel written and that Mark was like a secretary to Peter. Which means that Mark's Gospel is made up primarily of Peter's reminiscences of the life and times of Jesus as dictated to Mark. In other words, Peter – who was in the best position to hush up this story of his denial through embarrassment – is the very one who passed it down so that it would serve as a lesson and an inspiration for all followers who came after him.⁷

Just think of your most embarrassing experience ever. You go for an interview, think you have done really well, made a good impression. But then you get home only to be told by your "significant other" that you had your shirt on inside out. Or, you go out for a meal on a first date. You have bought a new outfit for the occasion. You feel you look really cool until you go to the washroom and find that the Indian curry you ate has

left an indelible yellow mark around your mouth. Or you get up to speak at a conference of pharmacists, eager to do a good job and show what a brilliant orator you are – until, that is, everyone begins to laugh and you realise that you have committed a spoonerism, referring to a well known company as Druggers Shop Mart.

Now, whenever you have an embarrassing moment like this, you would want to keep it quiet. Very quiet. Just hoping that everyone would quickly forget what you have done. So, could you imagine bringing your blunder, your mistake, your blaring error, your weakness to other people's attention? Of course not. But this is exactly what Peter did after his abject failure. He courageously used it to help, comfort and encourage other followers of Jesus Christ.

Peter put aside his embarrassment and discomfort because he wanted to tell the many Christian followers who would come after him in future times: If you think you have failed, if you think have fallen short, if you think you have committed the unforgivable sin, if you think there is no way back, then look at what happened to me. See how greatly I fell and yet how Christ, by his death on the cross, dealt with my past and restored me to new and better things.

It's almost as if Peter is speaking directly to us here and now: No matter how bad things are for you at any point, no matter what you have done, no matter how you have fallen short, no matter how unworthy you feel, take it from me – there is always forgiveness and new life beyond failure.

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¹ Adam Jacot de Boinod *The Meaning of Tingo*, Penguin Classics, 2007

² *The Macmillan English Dictionary*,

<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/New-Words>

³ Jim Salisbury, "A penitent Pettitte stapes up to face the press", *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, www.philly.com, Feb 19, 2008

⁴ Luke 22:54-62; Mark 14:66ff

⁵ Matthew 16:18

⁶ John 21:15ff

⁷ Donald Strobe, "What The Maid Said To The Fisherman", www.eSermons.com