

Like Occupy Central, or perhaps even more disruptive than that, the controversial extradition bill has shattered Hong Kong and its people, and has torn apart the fabric of our society. As we try to pick up those broken pieces and our sense of confusion about the way forward, we get together today to pray for wisdom, discernment and reconciliation.

Before we ask Rev'd Ip to lead us in prayer, I would like to share some of my thoughts with you through a poem called "A Poison Tree" by William Blake. While the poem is not directly about what happened in the past weeks, because William Blake lived in the Eighteenth Century, I would like to use this poem to illustrate a few points that perhaps can help us reflect upon the issues in Hong Kong from a different perspective. The poem, written in simple language, is easy to understand but is very insightful about the human psyche.

A Poison Tree by William Blake

*I was angry with my friend:  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow.*

*And I water'd it in fears,  
Night and morning with my tears;  
And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft deceitful wiles.*

*And it grew both day and night,  
Till it bore an apple bright;  
And my foe beheld it shine,  
And he knew that it was mine,*

*And into my garden stole*

*When the night had veil'd the pole:  
In the morning glad I see  
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.*

In short, the poem focuses on the issue of anger and resentment, which, if nurtured and allowed to grow, will take root in our hearts and the poisonous fruit that it bears will eventually be destructive both to ourselves and to others.

The first message that I want to impart to you comes from the first stanza. Here the speaker says, '*I was angry with my friend...*' and then he says, '*I was angry with my foe*' (enemy). The same emotion, anger, but directed to two different people: one that he thought of as a friend and the other he actively disliked and he labelled as an enemy. This brings out one universal truth about human experience, and that is *perception* changes the way we deal with people. For those whom we consider as friends, we tend to treat them differently: we are more willing to communicate our feelings, we are more predisposed to be forgiving and even perhaps more willing to make excuses for their actions. Yet, for those that we have already determined as enemies, those whom we have already made up our minds not to like, we are harsh, judgemental and critical. To show you the importance of how perception influences our judgement, I have brought you this picture. I am sure you all see that this is a picture of a frog. However, you might be wrong if we give this picture a 90° counterclockwise rotation because it now shows the head of a horse.

In the case of Hong Kong, people who are looking at the same issue from two perspectives that are diametrically opposed can never convince others

that they are right. People who have set their minds on labelling the other side as enemies have also set themselves up for a poisonous scenario.

It has been said that seeing is believing. If there is an element of truth in it, then what we see or what is presented to us becomes very important because in many ways it affects our judgement. We should be extremely careful, particularly in this day and age of modern technology when still pictures can be photoshopped, sound can be dubbed, video clips can be edited and there are many people who want to influence our thinking by manipulating what they want us to see or hear - something that the marketing people are very good at doing in advertising and commercials.

The second message that I want to share through this poem is how we deal with our negative emotions. The speaker in the poem says "*I told my wrath, my wrath did end*" and to his enemy "*I told it not, my wrath did grow*". The best way to deal with negative emotions is to talk about them, not necessarily to the one who has offended you but to people who are willing to listen and care about your feelings. By holding back that negative feeling, by bottling it up and not sharing it with others, the speaker indirectly allowed it to fester within. He began to nurture that seed of resentment he planted in his heart with fear and tears, day and night. It is like having a video recorder in our mind and we press the play button to loop that offence again and again, each time reinforcing it with fear and self pity. In the same way, allowing the television and social media to constantly feed ourselves with messages of hatred, images of violence, and a barrage of abusive language only helps to nourish the growth of such negative

emotions in our hearts. The end result, according to the poem, is destruction, not just to the person to whom the anger was directed, but also to the speaker who perpetuated that feeling of resentment. The apple in the poem immediately reminds us of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden that has brought sin to the world.

In Proverbs 4:23, it is written:

*Above all else, guard your heart,  
for everything you do flows from it.*

We need to guard our hearts because the heart is extremely valuable. It is the source of everything that we do. As King Solomon puts it, it is the “*well-spring of life*”; in other words, it overflows into our thoughts, our words and our actions. We need to be careful with what we put into it, and what we allow to nourish the thoughts we harbour there. We need to guard it well, particularly because it is vulnerable to attack. We need to make sure that we do not allow negative feelings such as resentment, jealousy, despair, or frustration to grow in it. We also cannot allow deceitfulness, self-pity, fear and cunning to fuel our emotions, for they will grow into a poisonous tree. By the same token, if we continue to allow hatred, violence, resentment, distrust and fear to take root in Hong Kong society, then like the roots of a poisonous tree, these negative feelings will affect everything that we do and the poisonous fruit that they bear is going to be destructive to both ourselves and to Hong Kong. We certainly do not want to see Hong Kong being turned into such a tree. Hong Kong should be a nurturing and nourishing tree of life.