

Bennochy church 31st March 2019

On Wednesday past, Louisa and I were in North primary doing some RME with p6. Each session we have been looking at a parable, and also a famous person. Wednesday's parable was the Good Samaritan, and we were getting the children to think about the 'unexpected helper', and how Jesus listeners would have been surprised and indeed shocked, that it was the Samaritan who helped the injured man. These were two nations who hated each other. That of course was the whole point of the story. In conversation, one of the girls said, '*don't judge a book by its cover*'. It is not what is on the outside that is important.

We do that all the time. Often it is sub conscious. People who look different. People who use language we would never think of saying. We make comment on that tattoo or, as society changes, the increasing number of unfamiliar languages. We do it all the time, and in most cases we are not delivering a value judgement on anyone. It is just conversation. Yet it does reflect on how we think.

Paul is writing to the church in Corinth, and if you remember, last week, I gave Paul rather a hard time. This particular passage, is a bit easier, is all about friendship, and he begins by saying, let's not judge people by human standards. I think we would want to support that. Coming back to RME at North primary. We introduced the children to Martin Luther King. He

was part of a society that judged people by human standards. If your skin was a different colour, in the 'land of the free', you were imprisoned within racial inequality. Bottom line. People were not treated the same.

We all know that God does not judge anyone by what they look like, and that one of the values of God's Kingdom is, everyone is equal in the sight of God. What is interesting, is that the passage does not begin with God, but with the transformation of humanity. He says, 'in Christ', and for Paul that is an hugely important phrase. It's about being joined 'with' Christ. Jesus is the vine. and we are the branches. It is that idea. 'In Christ', he says, the old has gone. The new has arrived. And in being transformed, we then look at people, as God does, with new eyes, but not before.

We now judge people differently, as God would. That's the idea. That's the point. We don't always get it right. When we look at the eyes of another, we do not always see the face of Christ. Human judgement says, no. God's values of compassion, justice and equality, this idea of being 'in Christ', says yes. The scale of that transformation is seen in Paul's language, a movement from judging Christ by human standards, to judging others by God's, and in what I am calling the 'breakthrough phrase'. That which is beyond transformation, and its impact cannot be fully described in human language; Paul says, *we are*

no longer enemies of God, we are now called his friends. That is the ultimate in friendship.

I would like to think we have always been God's friends, but the relationship drifted a bit, and God then takes the initiative to bring us back together. A message of friendship, both mystery and miracle that says, all of creation, will come to recognise God's friendship, through Jesus Christ. In other words, the friendship of God has always been there. *Jesus Christ, same yesterday, today and forever.*

One of the images of scripture we have of God, is of not holding a grudge. It does not matter what has happened in the past, Christ's hand of friendship is offered, now, and mistakes are forgiven. I want to ask, is that not a sign of true friendship? And if God has indeed grasped our hand with forgiveness and wiped our tears with compassion, then everything has changed. There is no going back. We can no longer judge others by human standards, and God says to us, our relationships, are now based on friendship

I want us to think about how that impacts us. Is this a passage we simply walk away from and say, Amen? Friends with God. 'Right on!' or does it make us think a bit more deeply, of how we actually apply our values, to the way we live.

It is very easy to 'compartmentalise' our lives into separate boxes, that don't actually speak to one another. We have our

'belief' box. This what the bible says. This what we understand about God, Jesus and life after death. Then we have our 'values' box. This is how we should live our lives. Put them together, it is about trying to make sense of the world roundabout us and our part in it. What is the purpose of life? Why are we here? What is it leading up to? What is the end game?

When we came face to face, with some of life's tough choices. It really shakes up the boxes. Questions start to dig into faith and reality can upset our values. For example, how do we judge and treat people, especially people who are different from us.

On our road from Jerusalem to Jericho, who have we passed by? What stops us from tending to the wounds of injustice? Have we journeyed with people to places of rest and care and paid the price? Have we been generous to those in need?

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, who was the friend? That is the question Jesus finished with. What did he say? Nothing theological. Just then, *Go and do likewise.* Amen.