

I was quite relieved that this week I find myself as the Canon Chancellor of Leicester rather than of St Paul's in London. The anti-capitalist protestors have been gathering outside and the cathedral authorities have had a delicate line to walk trying to be hospitable to protestor and tourist, to worshipper and staff member. One journalist put it starkly 'Where would Jesus be this week? Would he be camping outside in this freezing weather, speaking out against inequality, or inside the religious building, worrying about the revenue from tourists?' (Symon Hill, The Guardian, 20 Oct 2011)

Or what about if we lived nearby to Dale Farm in Essex where the Traveller's have been living but have now been removed? My colleague Barry Naylor tells me that very recently he noticed a sign on a pub near one of his city-centre parishes saying 'No Travellers'. It's not that long since we had 'No Irish and No Blacks'. Or what about the terrible story from China about the little girl who was knocked over in the road and no one helped her as she then died? The local authorities are now considering creating a law to require people to help others, their neighbours when they are in dire need. I wonder will that work?

Jesus says that all the hundreds of commandments given within the Jewish law just hang on two – love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself? These stories from the news as well as many other examples you could think of from your life this week illustrate how loving God and loving our neighbours as ourselves is not a cliché but a fascinating challenge and opportunity. One of the really interesting things about these commandments is that neither God nor our neighbours are exactly like us, they are different from us. At times we like to imagine that God behaves exactly like we would wish, doing the things we say and behaving in the manner we can fully comprehend. Sometimes this means that we make God a bit cosy and comfortable. To love God is to consider or apprehend or come before one who is other with a capital O.

And sometimes we like to think that neighbours are always lovely, just like us with good manners always saying please and thank you. When I was writing this sermon I had a very noisy bunch of street drinkers with very colourful language perched right outside my window at St Martin's House. Or when I worked with homeless people, others would quickly romanticise what it was like. It is hard to love someone who really smells badly and who is so damaged by their life experience that they just keep demanding more and at the most inappropriate moment. Neighbours come in all sorts of shapes and sizes but they all are other to us, often again with a capital O.

There is much more going on here in these commandments which is not just common sense or a collection of nice ideas. God is other and neighbours are other. Learning to live with the other starts in our very early lives. My sister just had a baby a few months ago and now that he is four months old she speaks of how much more engaged he is with the world. In the early days, he was lovely but he was just there, he wasn't really other. Now he smiles and the world smiles back at him. He cries and suddenly his bottom is dry and he has a full tummy again. He is discovering that he is immensely powerful and as such he is different or other .

The child psychologist Winnicott argues that our personality develops not just because of our genes but we develop in relation to other people. Initially a baby does not make any distinction between itself and its mother. They are one. But as they develop, the mother discovers that she can leave the child because she has to get on with other things and that the baby doesn't cease to exist without her. There is anxiety here that never completely eases. Whilst the baby discovers that they become more and more themselves as they learn to relate to mother present and absent in their lives. The disappearance of their mother does not mean the disappearance of them. And

they discover how they can use the immense power they have as an Other for good or ill. The baby asserts itself but also learns to yield to another.

Jesus says love God and love neighbour as we love ourselves. Both are other. The business of learning to work with and care for people turns out to be a way into serving and worshipping God.

It is encounter with that sort of love which opens us up a bit more, unclenches our hands and frees up our defensive body language to relate to neighbours with different backgrounds and views, different skin colours and religions, different politics and view points than ours. And the wisdom of Jesus choice of command has a further resonance because he says that we are to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. Modern psychology has further strengthened this thought because as human beings we are more like a bundle of different people than a single entity. If you like, there are others inside us, our sub-personalities or behaviours which make us rich and complicated.

Our staff team have recently done some work on how we behave when all is going well and is calm compared to how we behave when things are difficult and we discover that sometimes we can behave quite differently. Maybe at work we're Omni competent whilst at home we allow ourselves to feel vulnerable and uncertain. There are other David's which come to the fore in particular circumstances. Sometimes some of these characters that harbour inside us are not so easy, can be badly behaved and even destructive. The others out in the real world are often very like the others inside us. A former vicar from one of my previous churches often used a prayer in radio broadcasts. It always got more letters than any others – it starts 'I am two people and one is longing to serve thee utterly and one is afraid; O lord have compassion upon me.'

Austen William's prayer had that ring of truth which others recognised – the complexity, duplicity and opportunity that is a real human being. I am 2 or 3 or 4 people. The church becomes a school for love when a space is created to do this kind of exploring and learning so that we can honour God more profoundly, so that we can know ourselves more fully and discover that we are loved as well as being in need of love. That frees us to reach out to neighbours of every shape and size.

A former colleague writes about her daughter who attends a Church of England school. Hannah came home with a piece of paper on which she had written what she said was her 'pray to God'. The prayer said in translation 'Thank you God for myself'. Her mother Rosemary writes 'if that level of self-acceptance is all she achieves at St Mary's, we will bless the school for its wisdom and nurture' (p24, *The Courage to Connect*, Rosemary Lain-Priestley. SPCK, 2007).

This cathedral church is in that same business because here we learn how to love God, love ourselves and love our neighbours – all the others with capital O's that teach us what life in all its fullness means. This place is not primarily an essay in stone, nor a church institution but a school, a kindergarten for love.

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