

Deuteronomy 30.15-20; 1 Corinthians 3.1-9; Matthew 5.21-37

I wonder if it is impossible for us as human beings to have a relationship of any sort with someone, and not compare ourselves in some ways. If they are skilled at something, it makes us feel inadequate. If they are bad at something, we feel pleased that we're more competent. If they have an experience or own a thing, we usually want it too, and sometimes we're aware of our own power to make people envious. We always want to be better, to be able to boast, to have oneupmanship on someone.

When I was young I was perpetually disappointed at my own efforts to draw or colour creatively. My older brother was always so much better at art than I was, and even though I'd tell myself that it was just because he was two years older, I knew deep down that when I was his age, I would still not be as good. He had an innate skill which I did not. And it frustrated me. That searing awareness of not having a talent that I wanted was with me from the age of six, and to be honest, it's something that I still wrestle with - not so much anymore the desire to be artistic, but simply the struggle of wanting to be good at something that you

see in someone else. The might look like.

It's changed over the years. I'm not straight, well behaved hair, writing, at singing, at doing making friends. The list goes on. Seeing and desiring other people is the flip side of wanting to seem better. So even when I read The Hobbit, my motivation was to enjoy The Hobbit, and to do something that my brother would feel better than him in some way.

But the truth is that we are all relationships are one of the things we cherish and promote and we make them stronger. That's what love is. Other person without a sense of jealousy, to accept and admire who they are, and for the

Now, let's not sugar coat it. There are so many hard hitters. There are so many

says nice things and it's easy to preach a sermon about love and we can all feel good, but this morning's gospel is more like Jesus in a bit of a fierce mood. In fact, taking all of today's readings together, a theme which runs through all of them is an air of frustration, a sense that the people being talked to are continually not getting something. That the lesson hasn't taken root, that the idea hasn't clicked. Moses exclaims to the Israelites, 'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life!'; and Paul tells the Corinthians, 'Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh'. And underpinning all of it, is the fact that relationships are the key to everything. That loving God and loving our neighbour is the answer, but we keep finding that commandment so hard to figure out!

As Jesus talks through all of these commandments from the scripture, and expands on them, it might feel like he is being harsh, taking each law further than actions and applying it to even the way we think and feel. Surely, being angry with someone isn't really comparable to committing murder? Well, not in some ways, but, they are both things that are damaging to a relationship. Anger is not compatible with loving your neighbour. What Jesus is doing is taking the teachings

on prohibited actions like expanding their understanding of the doorways to examine our hearts, not just external. He is asking us to look inward, that damages a relationship, including anger, jealousy, and putting yourself over others. What Jesus is doing is the ethics of his new kingdom, where these emotions are just as key as the commandment to love one another, deeper than it's ever gone before, internalised so that kingdom love shapes our whole lives.

Because it's one thing to love your neighbour and present well, to have that love be visible for others to see. But it's another to be oriented towards love from the inside, as well as the outside. To keep the commandment and not just avoid anger, but it's necessary to love God and loving our neighbour, and that becomes just as important.

When Paul mourns that the Corinthians are 'infants', this is what he is

struggling to make that transition from concentrating on the outward to the inward. But our internal work is perhaps the most important. All the laws are there for guidance, and are useful, but we are supposed to be able to mature enough in faith so that we are not preoccupied with rules, but instead see their basis, the foundation of it all, which is - you guessed it - love of God and neighbour, and God's great love for us.

The fact that it's all about relationship is, I think, why God is a trinity. God is love, we believe, but you cannot have love as an isolated being. There has to be relationship for there to be love, and so the Trinity means that God is in relationship within godself, and therefore can embody love.

Focusing like this on our internal lives, and setting them up as being of paramount importance, ties in with what we've been hearing from Jesus over the last few weeks. It was hinted at in the beatitudes, where the poor in spirit and those who mourn and the pure in heart are blessed, because of their inward orientation.

So if it's all about relationship, then it's all about us gathered here. Us as the body of Christ is more than just a nice idea, it's key to living lives of the new

covenant. Our church can be a model of that trinitarian love within our own interactions. It's where we learn to become who we are, where we learn to develop and refine our inward lives. It's where we can learn to love when your older brother is doing something, and instead bring out the skills and gifts of our faith where they can do the same. It's a community of love that others want to be part of that.

So yes, it's hard. Jesus' way requires commitment and effort, but let's do this together. So let's listen and turn our hearts toward each other and encourage each other along the way. Amen.