

Romans 12:1-2, 9-21 – Not conformed but transformed

1 Peter 4:3-11 - Serve one another

Matthew 5:38-48 – Love your enemies

The Gospel message today is a hard one it demands everything from us- love your enemies- turn the other cheek- love your neighbour!

Our workplaces and our homes can be the most difficult places of all to be disciples. Nevertheless, for most of us, these are our mission fields, these are the places where we are called to show that Jesus makes a difference to us. In our lives. Can we imagine what our work environment would look like if we focussed on serving those around us (and especially those ‘below’ us in the hierarchies)? a disciple is being a witness to Jesus. Part of that witness is to be open about the difference that Jesus makes. As others see that we are different they want to know why, and if that difference is positive then interest is raised as to whether they could know that too.

Arguably the most challenging people to be different around are those with whom we spend most time, such as family and work colleagues. It is in seeing Jesus in our families, friends and colleagues that we learn to treat them differently, and in seeing God’s hand in the situations we meet in our daily lives that we come to react. A more directly faithful response to Jesus’ words and actions is to focus on how you treat other people – especially those you have power over, or who have lower status. But the real challenge posed by both Jesus and Paul lies in how you respond to those who hurt you. Do you try to hurt them back (or at least dream about doing so)? Do you just take it, letting them use you as a kind of punchbag ... and maybe doing the same to others? Or is there another way? As a psychiatric Social worker for over 20 years I learnt many coping strategies when “difficult” characters pushed me almost to snapping point! My bath in those years was immaculate as I found scrubbing it a release from my frustration-you could still get Vim then- do you remember Vim wonderful for scrubbing!

One thing we can see as we learn more about the things Jesus said and did is that he never used a one size fits all approach – one size doesn’t fit all. We are called to bless our enemies and to overcome evil with good; the shape that blessing will take depends on the people and the situation.

In some situations, with some people, a simple response of blessing and refusal to be provoked can be a wonderful witness, even a transformer of situations.

In others, boundaries become important, as can involving others. Occasionally even withdrawal may be the only loving option. Walk away rather than fight back!

Give everybody space and leave it all in God’s hands, with prayer.

Thankfully for most of us for most of the time the people and situations we face are not that heavy, but we should always be alert and ready to support those around us who need it. For each and every one of us the challenge is to live our lives, not as users and takers, but as people who serve and give, as followers of a Lord who gave up everything to serve us.

AMEN