

“That they might be one as we are one”.

This is how today's reading from John ends.

If this was Jesus's prayer then it is also my prayer today.

As a progressive congregation we respect the divinity of Jesus, as well as his humanity

Divine and human. However we individually define each of these words.

In what I am going to say today will show the fully human side of Jesus. I'm not sure I could preach it in many congregations.

Be warned in this sermon Jesus will not come out smelling of roses. I will be using the way his actions are described in Matthew's gospel. But like all sermons it is here to promote thought and discussion. And as I am fully human you should not take me as gospel.

If you disagree with me all I ask is that you suggest we sit down over a coffee or beer and discuss it rather than walk out as someone did over my children's talk at Eastbourne a couple of weeks ago.

I confess today's sermon started in its gestation before I looked at the readings for today.

It started in the crisis of a friend.

He was at a gathering where one of the other attendants has one of those very large personalities. They can be overwhelming in their 'presence', they can take up a lot of space. That is not say they are at fault. They are just true to who they are. No judgement here.

But in my 'self-care' I like to take this person in small doses as I can become overwhelmed. Especially as an introvert who is often peopled out by the time I get to the weekend.

Spending the whole weekend with this person was becoming more than my friend could cope with. This showed.

Mistaking his reservation at being near her to be about her "transition" in the last year she announced that my friend is 'transphobic'.

This accusation shattered my friend to the core.

Yes, My friend has many questions around transgender. But He is not phobic. He does not have a deep extreme fear that leads to physical systems like a racing heart, difficulty breathing etc.

Like me and many people, the label "trans perplex" is much more appropriate. In the right environment my friend would like to have open enquiring conversations with Tran's people.

The quickness to use the label 'Transphobic' closes down the opportunity to have such conversations. And in this case the issue was not "trans" it was the large personality. So the attack was miss guided.

This got me to thinking of my own journey as a gay man, the way in which the damming label "Homophobic" has been used by the gay community.

And here is where the sermon was conceived.

I live in a world that is polarised. Some People live in places of extremely opposed positions where there is no common ground where they can meet and talk. And when a new topic comes up often we are already in party lines. And adopt those party lines without consideration of our own personal thoughts.

An example of polarised thinking  
I'm Green therefore I support the reduction of carbon.

Coming from a farming back ground I have a lot of questions but do not often feel safe to ask them for fear of being labelled a 'climate change denier'.

The media and commentators tell us this polarisation has intensified in recent times. And they, I think have, contributed to it.

But polarisation is not new.

As I was thinking about Polarisation from a biblical perspective the relationship of Jesus and his followers to the Scribes and Pharisees come immediately to mind.

What I can see as I read the various passages of the interactions that Jesus and his followers had with the Scribes and Pharisees is that they were polarised.

Now Jesus's teaching was "counter cultural"

Eye for eye was replaced with love your enemy.  
Retribution was replaced with forgiveness

The law was to be interrupted through the lease of love.

I could go one but you get the idea. Most of you have heard the odd sermon on the teaching of Jesus.

As a counter culture preacher you would expect him to come up against the establishment. The scribes and Pharisees.

In two of his interactions with the Pharisees we have Jesus dining in their homes. But the Pharisees could not get it right. One is criticised for not following the hospitality Laws in allowing for Jesus to wash. (a prostitute is praise for doing this with her tears) The second time Jesus doesn't wash his feet when he given to opportunity and the Pharisees is accused of being clean on the outside but not the inside.

No wining here for the Pharisee.

The Pharisees come to Jesus with questions

They come to Jesus to test him

They observe him

They inquire.

And Jesus is recorded as using the Pharisees as illustrations of how not to live.

And Jesus is not averse to labelling.

The H word is used.

Hypocrite.

Have you ever been called a hypocrite?

Did you receive it with openness, appreciating the thoughtful insight into your personhood. Did you express your gratitude for them shearing this insightful information?

Or were you like me, quickly justifying your stand. Formulating the logic and consistency of your thought and behaviour.

And do you finish by confirming all the inconsistencies in your accusers behaviour. And then planning when to deliver this information for maximum effect.

The relationship between Jesus and his followers with the Pharisees continues to deteriorate.

Now you may think that **cancel culture** is new and applies to the internet and social media.

(:**Cancel culture** is a phrase contemporary to the late 2010s and early 2020s used to refer to a culture in which those who are deemed to have acted or spoken in an unacceptable manner are [ostracized](#), [boycotted](#) or [shunned](#).<sup>[1][2][3][4]</sup> This shunning may extend to social or professional circles—whether on [social media](#) or in person—with most high-profile incidents involving [celebrities](#).<sup>[5]</sup> Those subject to this ostracism are said to have been "cancelled".<sup>[6][7][a]</sup>

However cancel culture has been happening for as long as people have been disagreeing. Once things have escalated to a highly polarised place one of the tools is to get the middle ground onto your side .

In the gospels we see this in the masses calling for Jesus's crucifixion. Success for the Pharisees

Crucifixion is the ultimate in cancelling someone.

History is filled with the murder/execution of those people we disagree with. Whether it is a domestic dispute in a family or on the political stage.

Cancelling someone can be by placing them in prisoning. Exile, house arrest.

Or by revolution, insurrection. Military cue.

Back to the biblical. The Pharisees plot Jesus's downfall. We all know the Easter story.

**But there is two references to Jesus and a Pharisees that I have not commented on. They are not in Matthews gospel but in Johns.**

After Jesus's death it is not the disciples who come and collect his body. But according to John It is a rich man Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus.

What is the Pharisee Nicodemus doing here?

Nicodemus has fascinated me over the years.

I started off knowing that he came to Jesus in the cover of darkness. And that Jesus run rings around him talking about being born again. The way it was told to me was a continuation of the other encounters with Pharisees. Jesus on top!!!

But I have come to see that both men came in the cover of darkness. Jesus did not bring his disciples. He was also alone. Maybe his disciples would not have understood him meeting with a Pharisee.

With the experience of Age Nicodemus moves away from the place of winners on the stage. To a place where open frank conversation can take place.

The image I have is of these two men sitting with a skin of wine and some bread and spending the evening in a way that Nicodemus was able to get an understanding of where Jesus was coming from. Being born again into a new way of thinking leaving the old, the rock hard and unforgiving law behind. Replacing it with a deep respect to the personhood of the people before him.

Why do I come to this conclusion?

Because he again leaves the company of the other Pharisees and come to Jesus in the near dark to collect his body. The disciples are nowhere to be seen!

Nic is changed.

Not from hearing the 'Woe to you Pharisees and Hypocrites'

But from an open discussion. Where he could speak his truth. Where he could explore what Jesus was saying. One where he could get it wrong without being 'called out' but rather could be talked through.

After all that Jesus had said about Pharisees it shows something of Nicodemus's character that he was prepared to come to him

It also says something about Jesus that he was prepared to come on his own and have this discussion.

What is shown from this is change takes place when people come out of their corners. Where there is safety for all people. Nicodemus was safe to ask 'dumb' questions. Jesus was safe too. This was one man to one man,

I started this sermon with a friend being told he was. Transphobic. When Trans was not the issue of the discomfort in the relationship. But the result is he now has even greater fear in looking for a place where he can talk about what perplexes him about Tran men and woman.

I will leave Tran behind as I am not the right person to talk about Trans people.

But I can go to gay issues. In light of what I have said so far I want to apologise to anyone who has been called Homophobic. That is a cruel and hurtful thing to say to anyone.

Over the years I have had a number of discussions with people who have been Homo perplexed. They have asked questions. They have discussed what they thought were facts only to find they are myths or falsehoods or propaganda.

A personal story  
My first attempt to come out to my parents involved me moving the conversation to homosexuality. My father said,

"Well if people are that way then they are." That sounded hopeful

This was followed by. "Keep them away from My grandchildren"

Having just been disqualified from parenting my own children I changed the topic.

Later when I had been outed in parish ministry I called my family of birth together. I need to out to them before the heard from other sources, I was expecting the worse.

Again Dad spoke.

"I don't know what it means for you to be gay but you are still my son"

Over the next 5 years we had many discussions in the evenings when he came to stay with me. We talked about his statement about keeping homosexuals away from his grandchildren. He said all he knew about homosexuality was from Court reports of "homosexual men involved in having sex with children". All he had to go on was the miss reporting of Paedophile court cases. Reporting that confused paedophilia and Homosexuality.

Dad died as a strong supporter of Gay rights. It could have been different if I had 'cancelled' him as a dad because of his linking of paedophilia and homosexuality.

From Jesus experience and my own I think it is safe to say that creating space for open honest discussion where mistakes can be made is important. Where people can bring what perplexes them to the table and find answers and resolution.

Sadly too often that does not happen as people are too afraid to saying the wrong thing and so nothing is said.

When an oppressed minority asks for safety in meetings the result is often to close down discussion and the 'perplexed' remain perplexed for fear of hurting the minority.

Would history be different if Jesus had more discussions like his with Nicodemus.?

Instead Jesus died . His disciples were persecuted. And in time his disciples persecuted the Jews for killing Jesus leading to many acts of genocide pecking with the holocaust. Not much Loving your enemies going on here.

John. Gives Jesus these words before his ascension.

“That they might be one as we are one”

What are the controversial issues of today were you are perplexed. How could you find a place to sit over a bottle of wine and some bread were both you and someone explaining/ answering questions can be fully honest, frank and where light and understanding can develop.

Co governance? Emissions trading scheme.

You may support the general concept being a progressive but you still have questions that you have been afraid to ask for fear of being seen as conservative. A denier or even phobic.