



*A man may look on
glass....*

Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, says Jesus, I am there amongst them.

What does it mean to be a community in his name?

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them, says the Evangelist John¹

A community of God is a community of **love**. But how do we fragile and frail humans with all our muddles and confusions and fears manage to make a community of love together? Where to start....?

Love your neighbour as yourself, says Jesus, as S. Paul reminds us today.

Start by looking in the mirror in the morning.

And looking with God's eyes.

God sees you exactly as you are,

with all those things you wish he didn't see.

And all those things you hate to see.

And yet he adores you. Completely.

And it's that love he pours upon you that can wash and heal all those things you struggle with. But only if you let it in.

Tell yourself how loved you are. Despite it all. *Because* of it all.

Tell yourself the blessings that God would tell you he sees.

And if you really can't see any, come and talk to me.

You've got to love yourself, says Jesus, to love one another.

¹ 1 John 4, 16

There's something about Jesus – he is absolutely secure in who he is, and in the love the Father has for him, and for all creation. And from that security that he is loved, and all are loved, flows his freedom to be who he is. To live that love in the world, free from fear.

Love frees us. Frees from the fear that leads us to protect ourselves, or to try to prove ourselves or earn worth or affirmation, that leads to jealousy, hypocrisy, greed, disappointment and hurt.

It encourages us to grow into the people he meant us to be. We feel those parts of us that respond to his love stretch, and grow, and take up space that perhaps before was used for discontent and shame and angers and fears. Sometimes it may provoke us to draw a line – to lay something down, or to seek external help.

Love yourself, says Jesus. *Love one another, as I have loved you.* And as we learn to look at ourselves as Jesus does – to see ourselves in all our rubbishness and all our glory ... we can learn to look at each other that way too... To reflect the love we find in the mirror, all around us onto those with whom we share our lives, and our world.

Love your neighbour as yourself – looking at others as we do ourselves, in God's love for them - in all their imperfections and fragility, all the things that annoy us or bother us - and learning to see through those to the beauties and gifts, as God does for us. Pouring over them the love that we ourselves find in him.

And who knows, just as God's love helps us to reflect and grow in love, perhaps our love for others can do the same for them *in his name*. Either way, it will mean we ourselves don't get eaten up by our encounters with each other and become people we would rather not be, or broken down by others' behaviours into places of shame and hurt.

Our gospel today refers to an earlier passage in Matthew's gospel, where Jesus talks to Peter, on whom he will build the community of his Church².

² *Matthew 16: 18*

Jesus gives Peter – gives the Church – gives us – the power to unlock doors – to fling them wide, to new opportunities, new healing, new life.

And he also gives the keys to lock the doors. To protect. To shut out things that cause harm, to bring closure, peace, protection, and safety.

How do we stand in love when people's behaviour is destructive, and cause pain and damage to those around them? We see this, alas, sometimes in our everyday relationships with each other as we bump along the human road – or, tragically, in domestic violence and abusive or exploitative situations. Is Jesus telling us to endlessly absorb other's destructive behaviours?

Jesus calls himself our mother Hen, later in this gospel. The love of the hen that protects her chicks and keeps them safe, is also the love that defends them against things that hurt. This is an important part of God's love too.

... *Love one another, as I have loved you.*

Jesus says in our gospel today, if someone's behaviour is hurtful or destructive, try and work it out reasonably with them. If that doesn't work, reach out to others, and try with their help. But if it still doesn't work, there may come a time when you need to say to someone: 'this is not ok, and we need to name this, and to make space for safety'. Sometimes we need to pass them onto other agencies, or support, and sometimes we can only commend it in prayer to God and the angels to do their thing.

And yes, it is Jesus saying this. The Jesus who says, *love your enemies, don't hate, don't gossip or score points against each other*, also says, *don't put up with abuse, or destructive behaviour from others.*

Life often gives us something very sharp and broken to hold. But Jesus teaches us to reach out. To ask for help. One of the reasons that Jesus calls us together as a community, is that we need each other. That's what this messy, fragile, glorious, holy thing called the Church is all about, and as Jesus says, when two or three of us are together, seeking to be

together *in his name* - God who is love - then we grow as a community of justice, healing and love.

And the good news? The good news is that even when we can't find a way through, we do not have to give up hope.

Our Lord always has the power to redeem, and to make new.

Let such a one be to you, he says, *As a gentile and a tax collector...* those set outside the community, for one reason or another.

And yet... this is the Lord who built his church on Matthew, and Zaccheus - the **tax collectors** - who were astonishingly brought to repentance and to acts of mercy and reparation. Who built his church on **gentiles**; some of whom became his greatest disciples.

We can trust that God will find a way.

In the right time, and in the right place, our scriptures tell us (whether that is right now, or a long way off) all will be lifted up and made new, through his love, justice and mercy.

So, my sisters and brothers ... Let us love one another as God has loved us. Let us look in the mirror – (I'm serious) – every day and learn to look at ourselves as he does. And to grow into what he sees, laying down the broken parts, and stretching out into the goodness he sees.

And ... Let us learn to look at each other with those same eyes.

And let us trust, *in his name*, that wherever we are, there he is also, in his love, his healing, his grace and his just redemption.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, says S. Paul in another part of his letters, but then we shall see face to face. Let us gaze in the mirror in love... for we may just.... glimpse the image of God in ourselves, and in each other.

A man may look on glass, and on it stay his eye, wrote the great Christian poet George Herbert, or if he pleaseth through it pass, and then the heavens espy.