

(PP1) Becoming human- giving glory x 44 Sunday 04 November_2018.

Marks of a human: FAITHFULNESS AND UNFAITHFULNESS: I like to think that I am a person who knows about and values faithfulness. Faithfulness in all relationships – not just my marriage. Faithfulness in my friendships and in my community. I was fortunate to witness faithfulness in the home I grew up in. Just this week I went back to the church in Woodford where I was baptised at about 17 and made my promise to follow Jesus. This weekend I celebrate the 33rd anniversary of being inducted as Pastor of this church community where I have learnt so much from relationships about friendship, about trust and human strength and frailty. What do you value about friendship and faithfulness? (God modelled in perfect faithfulness in Jesus).

Some weeks ago, we returned to JESUS talking to his Disciples – his Followers about: -

Supreme blessedness: Matthew 5: 1. Jesus climbed the mountain, separated himself from the crowds and gave his attention to teaching his followers – disciples. He spoke about what it really meant to follow him and please him by the way we live our lives in community and in the world.

Text Matthew 5: 1, 27 – 37. READ.

Without a doubt this condition or experience of blessedness (human happiness or well-being – which is coveted by others) is not simply achieved through aspiration and effort. God's grace is needed – to enter and experience this depth of blessedness.

Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them fully. (v6)

JESUS in his teaching is surely correcting many of the false understandings that have arisen in many cultures and over many generations about the God and Human relationship. Hence his use of the phrase: ***You have heard it said BUT I say to you... (5:21)*** Religious systems and philosophies (like the Jewish Mosaic Law) because of human nature become corrupted over a period of time – there is a constant need to go back to discovering what is really pleasing to God to keep what is pure – so that we might move forward as people.

Call of JESUS: to live prophetically 5: 13, 14 Jesus calls upon his followers to be like SALT for the human race and LIGHT for the whole world. Something that should make us aware of our weakness and cry out for grace and help from God. Jesus calls his followers to prophetically – speak the truth about God and people and live the truth in the way we conduct our relationships.

Jesus spoke about living prophetically in the world (5: 11 & 12) – as he himself did. This counter-cultural living will challenge the people of the world but would (as in his case) result in opposition: insults, persecutions and evil lies being spoken against those who live this way (live righteously).

JESUS in what he said and how he behaved exhibited and demonstrated what it is to be truly human – ***Blessed are the peacemakers – they are the true children of God (v9).*** (Truly human). ***Matthew 6: 8 “Do not be like them”.*** Be different from the Pagans but also the Scribes and the Pharisees.

Jesus is describing a way of being and living in community – in relationship.

Here in *Matthew 5: 27 - 37* Jesus talks about faithfulness and unfaithfulness and truth speaking and promise keeping. A counter balance to selfishness and unhealthy individualism that are also identifying marks of being human.

So, what does Jesus have to say about faithfulness in relationships?

Jesus is here addressing matters of the breakdown of marriage relationship – so he talks of unfaithfulness - adultery and divorce but the understanding that faithfulness and promise keeping is foundational to all relationships is helpful.

Do you admire and aspire to be faithful in relationships? (Including friendship, marriage, community and business relationships? This is the Godly way – the way that God relates to people and what Jesus promises: *I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. I will be with you to the end of the age.*

Divorce? V31 In Jesus' day only males/ husbands could divorce their spouse. (Not the other way around). Women were essentially chattels – possessions and men held power and there were cases where some men any tiny excuse to get rid of a wife they didn't want. (The abandoned wife if not picked up again by their family, or another man was destitute).

There were 2 main rabbinic schools about this and Jesus is here making it plain who he sides with. In doing this Jesus is challenging men/ husbands about their treatment of wives.

Rabbi Shammai; took his line rigorously from Deuteronomy 24:1 fol – the sole ground for divorce was grave matrimonial offence on the wife's part that was “unseemly or indecent”.

Rabbi Hillel; was far more liberal – men could issue a bill of divorce for any course whatever. E.g. The wife burnt the food, or a more beautiful woman was desired. (The Pharisees tended to favour this liberal view. Jesus did not accept this interpretation which left women exposed and enabled men to behave badly if they chose).

Are we surprised then that many women chose to follow Jesus and he became increasingly unpopular with the Pharisees? John the Baptist before Jesus had been decapitated essentially because he attacked Herod's lax view of marriage and his sexual practices with his brother's wife.

Jesus challenged a society where men generally held the power and sex was used as part of that power base. Vv27-30. Jesus challenges men about lust – wanting

to possess a woman – whether inside or outside a committed marriage relationship. The 10th commandment in the Decalogue prohibits covetousness – interpreted as wanting to possess another man’s wife along with his other chattels (house, cars, clothes etc)!The rabbis wanted to limit the sin to the physical act of adultery (command 7) but Jesus argues it is NOT just the physical act of adultery that is wrong (a breaking of vows and promises) but the desires of the heart and mind. (In that sense Jesus held consistently to the view that we are probably all guilty of wanting to possess/ have what is not ours – *let he who is without sin cast the first stone*).

Jesus seems (like Moses) to accept that divorce is permitted/ inevitable but on the grounds of serious sexual sin – in this case on the part of the woman. (Simply because here women were powerless – legally the “weaker vessel”). Jesus is saying divorce (even with human nature being what it is – hard hearts) is not to be entered into lightly. Why? Well because promises/ vows are an important part of human commitment and relationship. They are part of what makes community and society possible.

What does this word PORNEIAS mean? We tend to translate it as “fornication” – but what sexual sins does that include? It must be more than adultery cos there is another Greek word that could have been used if Jesus just meant adultery (MOICHEIA). It is the sexual act with another that breaks the “one flesh” vow – it is betrayal. **(READ Matthew 19: 1 – 11 where Jesus reiterates the Creation understanding of “marriage”)**. Sexual immorality (as defined by the Bible) whether by married or single people is linked to the word PORNE (idea of prostitution; sex as a commodity) – God uses it to describe not just Hosea’s wife Gomer but also the way God’s people have been unfaithful to God.

Marriage is described in the Bible and affirmed by Jesus as an exclusive (not open) and permanent relationship between a man and a woman. (There are parts of the Christian church that no longer think that). So how is the world and church doing? Well in the US it is assessed that:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/infidelity>

Yet among heterosexual married couples, 20 to 40 percent of men and 10 to 25 percent of women stray in their lifetime. Overall, the percentage of both men and women who engage in extramarital [sex](#) has increased over the decades. Still, many committed relationships do survive infidelities. (RECONCILIATION is always a possibility but not a certainty).

Evidence is variously interpreted as to whether homosexual couples are more or less faithful than heterosexual ones. Evidence is variously presented as to whether hetero or homosexual singles are more active.

Some would say that JESUS is arguing for a ruthless form of self-denial as far as sexual activity goes. Without a doubt Jesus does call for self-denial when he talks about “taking up our cross” (Mark 8: 34). I would say that it may vary between us where we deny

ourselves for the sake of God's Kingdom...sexual restraint is obviously more difficult for some than others. For others there are other forms of denial that are beneficial to us. But if we fail to see that Jesus' teaching relates to more than me then I am particularly self-obsessed for my own well-being.

Jesus was concerned for the well fare of all in community – here particularly he is concerned for women/ wives who are being treated as lesser beings – chattels for disposal and replacement. Jesus calls for faithfulness in marriage and other relationships. He calls for simple statements and promises kept. (Vows are no more binding by adding big names to them – *let you yes be yes and no mean no*). This was not just the teaching of JESUS but also the early church leaders and it related to all relationships: marriage, friendship, business and community **READ James 5: 12. page 293.**

The Pharisees had developed complex rules for the swearing of vows and here again Jesus challenges them. He is concerned for truth speaking and simplicity. He in another place called the Pharisees “blind guides” – Matt 23: 16-22. Jesus sets his teaching against that of the rabbis and calls upon his followers to be different. God witnesses all that goes on in the world – in the public sphere, in the domestic and in the secret place of our hearts.

Jesus calls upon his followers to faithful in friendships and every relationship. He calls us to keep our promises and not to lie.

“There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” – Proverbs 18: 24 extolling reliable friendship. This is the friendship we want from human relationships and also it is promised us by Jesus who calls his followers “friends”.

I believe this friendship is craved by human beings. Many of us have experienced it and rejoice in it and have also been hurt in relationships but we still crave it. I knew a lady called Anne who was infamous on Bow for her push chair full of assorted dogs – Heinz 57 varieties. I once asked her if she liked people or animals best. Without a pause she said – animals they don't let you down. She was agreeing with Frederick the Great of Prussia perhaps the first recorded person who said, “Dogs are mans best friend”. Perhaps you know the film of the true story: “Greyfriars Bobby”. But although dogs can be wonderful companions, they will never be able to challenge us as a true friend can about our thinking, our feelings, our behaviour and our actions.

We each need at least one true and faithful friend. (*JESUS – friend of sinners*).