



Pastoral Principles
Lent Sermon Series
Christ Church, Epsom
2021

*In sincere gratitude to the members of Christ Church,
Epsom who contributed to these rich but challenging
conversations.*

HELD TOGETHER IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST:

Pastoral Principles
for living well
together



PASTORAL
ADVISORY
GROUP



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Week 1 'Acknowledge Prejudice' by Revd. Rosemary Donovan

Christ Church has been on a journey reflecting on how to be a truly inclusive church for several years. We believe that we are, and always seek to do our best to be an open, friendly, and welcoming but nevertheless have been unable to nail our colours to the mast. By this I do not mean flying a rainbow flag, I mean demonstrably being the type of church that Jesus would want to attend. A place where age does not preclude you spending time in His presence. A place where your bodily functions do not brand you as unclean. A place where your skin colour is not the thing people recognise about you. A place where who you are attracted to is not a big deal. The Inclusive Church Network was instrumental in highlighting that there was an issue in many institutional churches who despite believing and seeking to be welcoming of everyone perhaps were not so open and friendly when people who were perceived as different turned up. As a result, they developed a statement that was a clear indication to those who felt that a particular church might not be for them were wrong. Having explored the statement offered by the Inclusive Church Network the PCC at Christ Church felt that it did not go far enough but accepted that it was helpful to have an explicit welcome statement.

We have since written our own that makes it clear the direction of travel for this community. This has coincided with a national church initiative entitled *Living in Love and Faith*, which we shall be exploring later in the year at both Deanery and parish levels. In preparation for that discussion the staff team felt it would be helpful to spend this reflective period of Lent examining another Church of England resource '*Pastoral Principles for living well together.*' As you can see its very title includes a familiar phrase from our own Christ Church vision 'living well' definitely making it worthy of consideration. As a community of Christians, we are held together in the love of Christ. Our many differences are gifts that can build us up in trust and mutual affection ...or they can mar the image of Christ that we are called to reflect through our life together. LGBTI+ people in our churches have not always experienced this unconditional love of Christ and we need to admit and address this reality. These Pastoral Principles invite us to examine afresh our life together. The focus relates to LGBTI+ people, but they apply to all sorts of difference and diversity among God's people and certainly at Christ Church we intend making it wider in order to embrace the truly inclusive statement that we have recently adopted. Paying attention to these pastoral principles will help us to live out the good news of welcome to all people with its biblical understanding of new birth, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the common call to repentance and faith, and our new identity in Christ.

Over the next 6 weeks we will acknowledge PREJUDICE, speak into SILENCE, address IGNORANCE, cast out FEAR, admit HYPOCRISY, and pay attention to POWER for at least some of these evils will be at work in our church, even if not with respect to LGBTI+ people. We still need to ask who is missing? Who is present? Who is silent?

I feel passionately about this. I have experienced first-hand the wounding that exclusion gives. In my Curacy there was one particular lady who refused to receive communion from me. She could just about shake my hand in the peace as she knew it would be churlish not to. But never came to the altar rail when I was presiding so not to embarrass either of us. I was told to just accept it and put up with it but that did not mean it did not hurt. When I was growing up this was the only children's Bible available. The 'lovely' pictures show a very white middle-class Jesus, surrounded here by all his white male friends. There were no female leadership role models in the church, girls did not do that kind of thing. I felt a freak for even thinking about it - had I misheard the voice of God? Gender discrimination is a basic example of prejudice and it can be ingrained from childhood building up stereotypes of suitable roles for boys and girls.

As well as all the iconographies being male so was all the liturgical language and it wasn't until I was a theological college that my eyes were opened to appreciate that God was bigger than gender, sexuality or race. I feel shame now when the church that I love and have pledged allegiance to fails to acknowledge the humanity in another. Hence the vital importance of safeguarding and the need for repentance when things go wrong.

Today's first Pastoral Principle is acknowledging prejudice. Prejudices are very common - in fact, everyone has a prejudice in their lifetime. Have you ever looked at someone and made a judgment about them without even knowing them? Maybe you decided they looked smart because they wore glasses, or they were rich because they had lots of fancy jewellery. In a way, you pre-judged them, meaning you made a decision about who they were before learning anything about them.

This pre-judgment is called prejudice. The similarity between the words is no accident! Prejudice is an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling formed without enough thought or knowledge. You might be thinking that you would never pre-judge someone. However, at some point, everyone has a prejudiced thought about someone else. This is because there are so many influences on our ideas. Prejudice can come from movies, television, or from friends and family members.

Central to our faith is a belief that each of us is unique: we rejoice that we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. There is a sense of awe and

mystery about each one of us – an element of ‘otherness’ – that cannot be reduced to something that we can fully grasp within our finite understanding. This principle applies to all our relationships with people who are different from us, whether as a result of sexuality, gender identity, ethnicity, age or any other characteristic. I believe that all of us need to reflect deeply on our attitudes and behaviour in order to extend a Christ-like welcome to all people in our midst.

Reflecting on our attitude and behaviour lies at the heart of today’s Bible passages. The psalmist reminds us that God knows the heart.

“you perceive my thoughts from afar” and *“before a word is on my tongue you know it completely.”* Terrifyingly there is no escaping God for even the darkness will not hide our deeds, *“for darkness is as light to you”*. So, we had better take care with our thoughts and words. The WW2 poster ‘Careless words cost lives’ come to mind. How many times do many of us say or do things we did not mean especially catty or judgemental remarks even if it is just for fun?

- Look at what she’s wearing?
- Wow look at the state of him!
- I wouldn’t be seen dead in that!

Fashions, advertisements, and glossy magazines have a lot to answer for. And I know I am a sinner in this area too. There is nothing I enjoy more than a spot of people watching. Sitting in a café or pub garden (on days when we could do such a thing!) observing what is going on looking at what people are wearing, how they are behaving. Other people’s family or relationship dynamics are just so interesting hence the popularity of soap operas, another of my vices – this is starting to feel like a confessional but that is the point of Lent. To turn from our sin and make a conscious effort to do better. But we need to acknowledge it in the first place and sometimes our behaviour has become so common place that we fail to notice the error of our ways. Or maybe we have become so adjusted to social norms and expectations that we blindly accept something or do not even recognise it, let alone have the courage to face up to a bully or social injustice even when it smacks us in the face.

In recent years, a few Pastors have conducted social experiments to encourage people to take the log out of their own eye before criticising the speck in another’s. One example of this was Sam King in Reading lets watch what happened to him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5w2clxgX9RI>

When dressed in suit and dog collar Sam was treated kindly with respect with many people stopping to help him. When dressed more scruffily he was frequently ignored or brushed off. Appearances do matter that is why people

dress up for interviews. We all know that people make judgements based on what people look like even when we know it's what inside that really counts. Jesus says, "*I know my sheep and my sheep know me*". He looks at the heart not the external appearance. You might be thinking what has what people wear got to do with acknowledging prejudice. For me it is an easy way in to demonstrating that we all have prejudices whether we realise it or not. If left unchecked prejudice can often lead to bullying and other forms of discrimination. These create an atmosphere of fear for what might happen at any moment and fear for what the future might hold. In extreme cases this can lead a person to take their own life.

Failures within the institutional church with regard to safeguarding has led to abuse and mistrust. That is why it is important we examine these pastoral principles as conversation starters and continue on a journey to mature discipleship in order to grow our church and be more missional in outlook. We want Christ Church to be a safe place where all are truly welcome for who they are in Christ, a beloved child of God.

Acknowledging prejudice is a good place to start because of our understanding that everyone is made in the image of God, we will receive our differences as gift, valuing all people, and seek to see Christ in all our neighbours. To help us do this we will acknowledge and address our prejudices.

We are all conditioned by our experience of life, positively or negatively. All of us must reflect deeply on our attitudes and behaviour. All are loved children of God. The cross of Christ is for all. The journey from prejudice to hatred is a short one as the Passion narrative demonstrates.

How do we welcome people as they are, rather than welcoming them in the hope they will become and behave 'like us'?

- We believe everyone is loved by God – but how do we demonstrate?
- Welcome: learn names and listen first (possibly to their fears about being amongst church people) This may involve "reading the silence"
- Human beings are programmed to fear unknown; we need to fight programming through faith and positive example.
- Try and reach a common understanding where views may be (over-) firmly held.
- Learn from our own experience of prejudice (most of us have had this at some level)

Week 2 *'Speaking into Silence'* by Merinda D'Aprano

Speaking into silence is a rather odd phrase, and I think it simply means saying something to give support or draw attention to a tricky issue when it would be easier to keep quiet or turn a blind eye, for a variety of reasons.



It's because as human beings we naturally prefer not to rock the boat or challenge the power bases or name the elephants in the room. This is the silence we do not speak into.

Our motives may be good; kindness and sensitivity to people privacy, from genuine deeply held belief, from fear of drawing attention to ourselves or others, from distaste at disagreeing with our friends or our peer group, from not wanting to challenge our traditions, from not knowing what to say or how to say it, thinking it isn't our business and so on.

To be honest, when things are awkward it's much easier to keep quiet. Our social culture is all about this silence, and we are trained into it very young. We are encouraged to be polite people. We don't want to express disapproval or to engage in uncomfortable discussions about things we condemn or, heaven forfend, consider racy things like sex in a church. All these feelings are normal and reasonable. This is why there are silences into which we do not speak.

However, to be a community that is authentic, that comes together as the body of Christ we owe it to ourselves not to shy away from knowing each other underneath the masks and loving the real people we are here with.

In all honesty, I had to force myself to even speak about speaking into silence, because I too don't want to rock the boat, or make myself vulnerable by having views that I fear some of you don't want to hear about or talk about at all – but that of course is why I need to, to help all of us to understand that when we decide some things are better not spoken about, we are acting on our own natural bias, and not necessarily being considerate or helpful to people who need to be included and cherished and recognised, and to have

their stories affirmed, their experiences valued and their needs heard in this community of Christ.

I am not saying at all that we need to go and shout our opinions from the roof tops, especially if they are likely to be confrontational or hurtful, but actually it is not mature or healthy to think that absolute silence is better, because it can create fear, shame and despair, and it stops us truly knowing one another, so we need to be wise enough to see the difference. Jesus was utterly authentic. When he said “love your neighbour as yourself” I don’t think he meant and make sure you don’t know them well enough to have to address them as real people.

Speaking into the silence means recognising that sometimes things are overlooked and avoided because of the power in a place, for maintaining the status of the in-crowd. If you are not quite good enough to be in the in-crowd then you are on the margins. The kind of margins where we would probably find Jesus himself at work.

Why are we here in church at all? It is about worship and fellowship, ministry and growth of faith. But we have probably chosen to come back to this particular place, to be among like-minded people, similar disciples of Jesus, people who share our standards and our beliefs, who like the style of services or the beauty of the building, people with charitable hearts, good people, people like us.

A few months ago, one of my friends left a physically abusive marriage with the hope that her church friends would support her, and yet her vicar and church community tried to encourage her to reconcile with her abuser. Eventually she left because ending her marriage was considered not upholding her lifelong vows. These were good kind faithful people acting in line with their beliefs, but they were also face to face with something they did not want to think about, talk about, appear to condone or even find out more about. They created a silence. In another church a single parent was vilified and rejected because her children looked so dishevelled and badly cared for. She left the church in embarrassment at the comments and looks. But she had lost her job, had no immediate benefits and was actually starving herself to feed her children. When she lost her home too she was gathered up by a local charity who got her back on her feet. She has not returned to church. The silent power of not fitting in was far too strong to speak into.

In 2015 a young teenager called Lizzie Lowe, ended her own life because she came to understand that she was not an acceptable person of faith because she was a lesbian. Obviously opening that conversation was beyond a 14 year old. And so a beautiful child is gone because these was a

silence. The work of her vicar, Rev Nick Bundock and John Bell of the Iona community, whose songs we sing regularly in this church, have drawn attention to the fact that silence alienates and excludes people, that it allows for shame to creep into the silence. When people dare not or choose not to speak about fundamentals of your existence, such as your status, your sexuality, ways in which you are different from the tribe, then deep personal shame is the default position. When you feel that shame, and if you cannot change the thing you are ashamed about, how can you stand up against the crowd or make yourself vulnerable to their distaste or pity? And why should you have to do that alone anyway?

In the 'Living in Love and Faith' series we are being asked by the Bishops, not just here, but church-wide, to do a difficult thing, to have conversations, to listen and to hear with our hearts, the realities of the lives of LGBT+ people of faith, who are already members of the body of Christ. To be clear, this is not about changing anyone's minds, or campaigning or putting up pride flags, it is about valuing people on the margins of our community, recognising those thousands of sisters and brothers in Christ who are already here, and those who wish to be here feeling welcomed and included. Nobody in the body of Christ needs to feel shame for being who God created them to be, no matter whether you like or agree with them or not, and regardless of whether you would make the same choices as they do. We are after all asked to follow our own vocations and journeys and relationships with Christ and discern God's will for ourselves, not for others.

One thing I often hear is that there is an anxiety about labels (and obviously sometimes labels and especially name calling are not helpful) but I believe that sometimes we don't want to use the names or labels people ask for because our unconscious bias means that we think we would not like that label ourselves, because we see it as shaming or nasty, and so they should just be quiet in order not to draw attention to it. Whilst it is fair enough to say that the person should recognise that in some contexts these labels are unimportant, not mentioning it in other situations implies it is something they should be ashamed about, or at least be wary it might upset people.

For example, I feel some anxiety in church when I introduce my same sex partner despite the fact that in the secular world this issue is old news. I have been with her for 27 years, but instead of pride I walk on eggshells because of some of the comments and looks I have received in churches. I wonder how many of you feel that when you introduce your partner, married or unmarried? It is important to recognise that just because something does not affect you it is not a closed book. We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ in this world. Can we do that if we don't put ourselves in other people's

shoes and take the time to listen to them and to value their voices? It is worth noting this is not an LGBT+ issue: depending on the culture of the individual church the silence can be equally uncomfortable for couples without children, single people, divorced parents, unmarried mothers, families of AIDS victims, BAME people, people who have hidden disabilities or who have been abused, or married partners with different faiths or none, and so the list goes on through anyone who it is not quite the same as the rest of the tribe.

Because, make no mistake about it, every congregation of church of any denomination has natural tribal affiliations and affections. I hear many people talking about the quality of welcome here and I agree I loved this place from the first time I visited. But perhaps that is not surprising, because I am a white, straight acting, middle class, well educated, professional, churched person with skills that fit the needs of the community. If I had arrived with a buzz cut, tattoos and facial piercings, but still the exact same person underneath, how welcomed would I have been by the whole community? And if I didn't return, because I didn't feel that I fitted, who would have asked the question as to why I had not stayed? Might you have been relieved? Asking questions that challenge and change us, looking at uncomfortable realities, reaching out to people on the margins – that is speaking into silence.

Naming the elephants helps us to be a more honest community, even if some people love the elephant and some people hate it, some may be afraid of the elephant, or just afraid to share their positive or negative opinions about it to others in case it is uncomfortable, unpopular or just embarrassing. We also need to be careful of making assumptions. For example, as a gay person I'm not here to campaign for same sex marriage. I am however a campaigner for feeding and empowering the poor, safeguarding everyone in creation, helping to create safe spaces for all the children of God and educating the world about the love of Jesus Christ through the best example I can offer. Nor is this about challenging the orthodoxy of our faith, it is about loving the whole body of Christ, ensuring that everyone in that body is valued for who they are, and that everyone has the support of other voices speaking up for their right to be heard in a powerful silence that they may not be able to speak into themselves.

Finally, if we need to be reminded how dangerous and fear-filled silence can be. The IICSA safeguarding inquiry made it abundantly clear that all the forms of abuse reported in our church in the last 50 years have been enabled by silence. Silence on the victims of child abuse, silence on the adult victims of clergy sexual predators, silence on the acceptance of domestic violence or abuse as a part of marriage, cruel treatment of unmarried mothers, LGBT+

conversion therapy, lack of education around intersex and trans gender issues, the shaming of suicide victims and their families, and the treatment of women leaders in some church settings. The body of Christ has been very deeply damaged by the straightforward understandable, very normal tendency of people like us to think we have nothing to say, no business to interfere and no right to ask. When the people on the margins need us to speak into the deafening silence for them, we often don't. Some of those reasons are absolutely legitimate, but some are not, driven by our own bias and traditional allegiances.

So as you go into breakout rooms you have a really tough and honest question to consider: Given what I have said about the nature of silence, the power of silence and the pain of silence - what would stop you from speaking into silence?

What stops us from speaking into silence?

- Feelings of being bullied stay with you.
- Fear of being attacked.
- Hard to know when to confront and this leads to avoidance.
- Complexity of language
- Getting facts right before speaking out
- Fear of opposition dominant counter opinions
- Need confidence.
- Question of power and feeling undervalued.
- Prejudice > unconscious bias
- Not being able to express things due to lack of knowledge.
- Fear / anxiety about rocking the apple cart.
- Quiet voices are often spoken over.
- Safe space needed.
- Risk of hurting others and this triggering difficult stuff
- Embarrassment or fear of upsetting others

Week 3 'Addressing Ignorance' by Revd. David Fox Branch

Give, and it will be given to you.

This week's Pastoral Principle is Addressing Ignorance, which is described as one of six 'pervading evils' but three of these: fear, power and ignorance are not, in themselves, evil.

Their reason for being, their influence and what we do with and about them: it is in these, that we discover where the evil abides.

We are born ignorant. In John 15:22, Jesus makes clear that you cannot be blamed for the ignorance of simply not knowing things when you have no means of knowing them.

But he also makes it clear that sin arises when you do have the tools to know better but don't use them.

That might simply mean seeing that somebody is different to us and choosing not to try to understand why but, instead, condemning them.

Which, as Jesus points out in today's gospel, invites condemnation on us.

Let me tell you about Seth. That's not his real name but it will do. Against all possible evidence, Seth was convinced that he had a gift as an evangelist. I met him after a service in my old church.

He'd been there amid all the candles and hints of incense; the gold-leaf Mary as Queen of Heaven staring vacantly in his direction from behind the tabernacle, the priest in an old-style fiddleback chasuble – if you don't know what that is, go google it – and I think that when we got to 'so to eat the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ' something must have gone off in his head.

I spent next the three hours hearing how the priest and I and – by extension – everybody who worshipped there, were on the hell express because we were all idolators.

I also spent the three hours hearing how he felt called to tell everyone about the love of Christ.

He would go down to the benches by the ponds, where young people gather to have a snog and a fag and some cider, and he would evangelise by telling them that they were sinners.

And of course, he's right, and of course, that's where Jesus starts his preaching ministry, with repent and believe, but Jesus was preaching to

people who already knew that God exists; my friend-to-be was approaching people who, on the whole, didn't even agree with him on that.

It's not even, that the very idea of sin is meaningless if you do not have an idea of God to go with it; it's that it's actively offensive.

To be told that you are somehow deficient because of the things you love to do, or the people you choose to be with, or – and this is the nub of our discussions over these weeks – because of things that you can't change about your inner being or your outer life – that is offensive.

Seth never won a single convert.

How he didn't end up in the ponds at least once, I don't know - he might have done if it had been me as a youth on that bench - but I am certain that he passed on the bad news of a God.... and church... that judges.

That had, knowing nothing about those young people, already decided that they weren't good enough.

It's the idea I grew up with, too. And if that's what God thinks of me before I've even said hello to him, what's the point of trying, really?

We need to understand – we need to not be ignorant of the fact that, to many, that's what the church represents. Not goodness. Not mercy. Not love.

Judgment, condemnation, oppression and ignorance.

We need to take hold of the fact that for many - and here I need to be explicit and say not just LGBT+ people but people from all across society - the church is a pervading evil.

Because they, or people they care about, or hear about, have experience of the church as a place that is the exact opposite of what it should be.

And I think that a large part of that experience is down to ignorance.

That's really hard to hear, isn't it? You may not wish to believe it. But I can tell you that when Jo and I started becoming regular church goers, we lost friends. People assumed that because we were Christian we would start judging them. It's what they had come to expect.

How do we address this?

Give, and it will be given to you.

In various places in the Gospels, the evangelists make it clear that Jesus would know what was in people's hearts or what they were whispering about.

If Jesus knew what was going on within the people he met then we should attempt to, too. We need to embrace the vulnerability of offering to understand.

That doesn't mean agreeing with everyone, it doesn't mean thinking that they've got it right, the way they live.

It also doesn't mean kidding yourself that you can feel what they feel, of 'knowing what it's like' but it does entail knowing something about why it is how it is.

About the meanings in somebody else's life.

About what 'I am' means rather than assuming that they are how they are because of 'I choose'.

About being willing to use vocabulary you're uncomfortable with, at least for a while, because otherwise they can't properly tell you about themselves; it means being willing to move towards empathy.

And when we start that journey, we tend to find that understanding and empathy are given as well as offered. Ignorance evaporates on both sides and reconciliation occurs.

Ignorance prevents authenticity in our relationships because it prevents us from seeing people as they see themselves.

Empathy allows us to stand alongside somebody even when we don't agree with them.

What do we need to do to move from ignorance to empathy?

- Love people, want to do it.
- Keep an open mind, not being quick to impose.
- Be open to unfamiliarity.
- Understand other people's position avoid unconscious bias.
- Take an interest ask neutral questions.
- Learn from young people.
- Empathy not sympathy that projects own view
- Form relationships rather than casual interaction
- Accept vulnerability and that this is hard.
- Educate ourselves, walk in another's shoes.
- Active listening x3.
- Practice forgiveness - Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner (to understand everything is to forgive all): but the forgiving may need to be of oneself for recognised past failure of empathy.



Week 4 'Casting out fear' by Revd. Sue Curtis

We are thinking today about Casting out fear.

There is fear about 'breaking ranks' and speaking out. There is fear that if one's personal circumstances are known then friendships may be affected or the validity of one's ministry may be called into question. There is fear among the clergy of how they may be held to account as they attempt to care. There is fear that a bishop's known views will colour his or her engagement with their people. These kinds of fear must be addressed because it can corrupt our life together and imprison individuals.

When we looked at speaking into silence, there was, in our discussion, the recognition that we need to face things and not pretend they don't exist or don't need to be addressed.

We fear people who are different from us. We fear that we are not being authentic to our faith, citing the overwhelming imperative to love our neighbour, or Biblical authority and context and how we should understand that. We fear change, we fear the cost of change.

So, on this Mothering Sunday, we are looking at Casting Out Fear. Fear and worry are part of the job description for mothers and all those who care for others they love, so there is a certain irony here.

Let us think of Mary, mother of Jesus, fear was certainly part of her experience and she had legitimate causes for fear: from learning she was to give birth to a child to the horror of watching his execution.

Let us listen to the possible thoughts of Mary.

Me pregnant. I was worried no one would believe me that it wasn't possible, especially my parents and Joseph. I had never been with a man. This was closer to terror than fear, but God had it under control and Joseph was there for me. God sent him messages too. Before the birth Joseph and I had to go to Bethlehem for the census, eighty long miles. I was exhausted and then we had to beg for a place to stay, not the best way to bring any child into the world but somehow, I knew God was with us, at the heart of it all. In all that squalor and fear, by then, we knew we were where we were meant to be on holy ground. Fleeing to Egypt, that was driven by desperation and the fierce instinct to protect my child, God's child. It was terrifying. There were some calmer years and then when he was 12 we lost him. Joseph kept saying he would be alright, with relatives, with friends, but I am his mother, and I knew I needed to find him. From then on, I looked at him differently somehow, he was wise beyond his years. I knew he was courting disaster when he left Nazareth and went off finding a band of friends, doing amazing things but speaking out, challenging everything people held dear and questioning the authorities. It led directly to trial, torture, to a cross, an execution. There can be no greater fear for a mother, no greater anguish than watching his pain and humiliation. In all that horror and in his pain, he handed me over to John and I remembered Simeon's words: "a sword will pierce your heart." This was it, and even in all this fear, he knew, and I knew, God had us cradled in love, and love casts out fear.

I spoke to my daughter about parental fear, she has a 4-year-old called Felix, in New Zealand, and he is autistic, practically non-verbal, physically highly advanced and he knows no boundaries, a boulder with the speed of a child twice his age on land, up trees and in water. He is unfailingly cheerful and responsive, on his terms. He doesn't have any fear at all.

Lizzie's words: -

My son was diagnosed as autistic when he turned 2 and a half. There was some worry early on, which came with the unknown: why wasn't he talking, could he hear and, if not, did his ears hurt him etc. With the diagnosis came instant understanding and relief. It was very obvious and I was unsure how I had missed it.

My husband and I decided straight away that everything was ok. Our children were all healthy and thriving and if this was the biggest challenge as parent, we were incredibly lucky.

The first six months came with worry, mainly about speech. We kept thinking that everything would be alright “once he could talk” then the realisation hit that he was already “alright” and his lack of spoken language has made him independent and resourceful beyond his years. While speech is the most common form of communication it is by no means the only valid form.

While there was some worry and a fierce protectiveness against a world that still doesn't really get it, there never was sadness or desire for him to be different. That is because his autism is as much a part of him as his gender, ethnicity, hair colour, etc. I would never be sad for who he is: his amazing body that needs to run and spin and jump and his amazing brain that learns through movement, and sees patterns and colours in everyday objects.

Being a mother to an autistic boy is much the same as being a mother to his brothers. There are joys and challenges parenting all 5 children. He may need to be watched more to keep him safe, and I have to “listen” harder to his needs. But also, he can entertain himself; he does not get bored or say my name as a request for help 1000 times a day! Your parenting adapts to the different needs of your children whether they are gifted, sensitive, neurodiverse etc. And if you were to ask the hardest part of being a parent the answer would be the same for all of them, the endless washing and packed lunches. If you were to ask the best part of being a parent, the answer would also be the same. Taking joy in what brings them joy, relishing in their achievements whether that be getting a gold medal in gymnastics or learning to say “no” for the first time at the age of 4.

I also read a mother's response to realising her child was gay.

Asked by her daughter how she got from disapproving of her child being gay to being ok with it, she said it was the wrong question. She said how do you adjust to something nobody prepared you for? She said that back in 1970s and 80s people referred to gay people in negative terms and equated it to crime. She said the world expected her children to be like everyone else and slowly she realised that made no sense, that my growing up looked different even from my siblings and that there was a pain that she didn't understand and wanted to remove. When she realised what it was troubling me, it was shocking and she had to adjust to loving me as I was, not as she hoped I would be. She had been taught it was wrong, but she could see no reason why I should be an example of anything except me being who I was intended to be. She saw that I was a good person, with good morals, faith and integrity. That was the surprise, that the so-called wisdom was wrong. She said that this was actually never about God, although it was a bit about letting go of what other people at church might say as they were particularly

vociferous. She said that people used God as an excuse to judge. She said God made me and he made me exactly as I am and it was never a question of whether she should love me, or of whether it was right or wrong. People approve or disapprove of whatever they like. That is rather immaterial... but God makes things perfect, just as every mother's child is perfect. And so, she has accepted it because we are called to love our families and not to reject what God gives us, and she trusts that God made me as intended - perfectly - and she is proud of who I have become. She says approving or not is a strange preoccupation, we are all here because God made us different for a reason. We should just worry about how we treat others. This she has known from her earliest church teaching and now she is happy to be living it.

Mary teaches us how to move from fear to trust without diminishing our involvement. It is about being open to change and being able to listen within those fears to both the principles Jesus shows us in scripture, and the voices of those who are different from us. True love involves authentic understanding of the other's point of view and loving them as God made them: - radical and anti-establishment, neurodiverse, gay: however, they are made, we need to love them in that.

How do we move away from fear of that we do not understand to a fresh understanding based on loving our neighbour even if they are different?

- Try to see people through God's eyes
- Seek empathy.
- Listen without prejudice avoid false presumptions of what's going on inside
- Not our place to judge let God sort it out
- Challenge traditional mindsets
- do we put up fear as a barrier?
- See people as Jesus would see them
- Accept our own baggage and put it to one side
- In a fast paced world we need to pause 1st and not always say the instant thing
- Name our fears – e.g. fear of saying the wrong thing and offending.
- Be open to hearing someone else story
- Fear is related to lack of understanding and putting people in boxes
- Nothing to fear but fear itself

Week 5 'Admit Hypocrisy' by Berwick Curtis

So far in this series on Pastoral Principles we have looked at Prejudice, Fear, Ignorance and Speaking into Silence. There is obviously a broad overlap in these principles as we consider the ways we interact not just with our fellow church members but with all those we come into contact with. And is there a difference in the way we connect with these two groups? Are we more careful, more honest in the former or maybe the latter? Are there things we would not discuss or allude to in our conversations with other church people? Do we avoid politics and religion with either group for fear of stepping on people's toes?

The Church nationally and internationally, in all its manifestations, has had a bad press for many years now: abuse, discrimination, sexism, being out of touch with society. The result is that the Church appears to many to be losing its right to the moral high ground and is seen by the world outside, the unchurched, as hypocritical and morally bankrupt. And to the dechurched, those who have abandoned the organised church for various reasons, be it the lack of inclusivity, which we heard about from Merinda, or the disparity between Christian morality and the actual behaviour of those in positions of responsibility.

It can take a lot for someone to be convinced that we are not all just a load of hypocrites, spouting virtue but acting just like everyone else does.....

What should make us different?

Perhaps we need to remember that we are called to love and service, not to label and criticise. And we need to remember too that "we are all sinners", a churchy way to say that we are prone to self-centredness and cliquism.

Peter Greig writes in his book on which our prayer course is based: The thing that keeps God out of our lives is not our sin. It is our compulsion to pretend, to cover up our nakedness with fig leaves, to climb sycamore trees in order to see without being seen.

Nevertheless, we read of the early church "See how these Christians love another". And later the Church becomes recognised for its love and acceptance of the marginalised in Roman society. The Church was to go on to provide education and healthcare in an often uncivilised world until it was gradually recognised by governments that these things were needed, not just for moral reasons but to keep the population from rebelling.

Perhaps the origin of the word hypocrisy gives us a clue as to why it might be seen as the basis for all our misdoings, our failure of omission and

commission. The word means wearing a mask to hide reality and in ancient Greece referred to actors who wore fixed masks which concealed their true nature or identity. And today we see that we are all encouraged to get an image. Not to strive for the truth of our nature and aim to eliminate all that is counter-productive in our makeup. All that looks to the self in the ego-centric world we are encouraged to live in. We all seem to need images to relate to – government, the monarchy, celebrities, our heroes, our history. And images to criticise – our government, our monarchy, our celebrities, our heroes, our history.

Jesus was faced by hypocrisy on various fronts, the Temple authorities, the Sadducees, who were so intent on keeping the status quo and their own power, the Pharisees who were so legalistic that the love of God was hard to recognise in their conduct, the Romans with their culture of violence and the entrepreneurs of Jesus' day seen in some of the parables, who exploited, who thought only of the profit to be made.... Sounds familiar?

In our reading today we see just one of many examples of such hypocrisy. Just what did they object to in Jesus' social teaching – he was breaking the rules! Sometimes rules need to be broken to highlight injustice, corruption, abuse. The Church has not always been good at that; it has been seen too much as part of the establishment. For many it's too close to our understanding of the Sadducees and Pharisees for comfort. To quote Peter Greig again: All too often, it is the church that creates cultures in which people feel compelled to pretend.

But also, the Church can't win as bishops are urged not to get involved with politics, not to rock the boat, not to continue the prophetic tradition of the OT. Not to speak the truth to injustice, not to speak truth to power.

We need to take seriously the injunction to look for the plank in our own eye before worrying about the speck in our neighbour's. But how do we do that?

We need to reflect on our behaviour, to think, before we criticise, on the effect we may have on others, to strive for compassion, for empathy. It is not easy to move beyond the general consensus of the society in which we live and see things with Jesus' eyes, to act as his hands, eyes, ears, feet and heart in the world, at least, that part of it in which we act, interact and react. Yes, that is just what we are called to do, perhaps prick a few bubbles, invoke scripture, and reason, and respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

How can we recognise and combat hypocrisy which is in us all to the benefit of our fellow human beings?

- Listening
- Calling out inconsistencies
- Take plank out of own eye - practice self-examination.
- Begin with Jesus - what would he do?
- Set own boundaries and conduct and acknowledge when it falls short.
- To reflect is past tense -already gone too far.
- Advantage of confession in liturgy
- Be honest with ourselves.
- Use the Ignatian Examine regularly
- Don't be politically correct when called to act.

Week 6 'Pay attention to power' by Revd. Rosemary Donovan

A little more than a year ago, the great powers of the world were confident. America, the No1 economy in the world, was in the midst of one of the longest rising financial markets in recent history. China, the No2 economic power, was flexing its military and economic muscle. Europe was getting ready for another high tourist season in Spring and Summer.

But then a tiny microbe came along and changed all this. Political leaders, business leaders, scientists, were all caught unprepared and confounded. Many people grew ill and died. Economies went into a tailspin. It was like being out at sea, caught off-guard by a violent storm.

So, what are we to learn from this crisis and how are we to make our way out of it? Perhaps Palm Sunday, the setting for this drama, provides some clues to answering this riddle as well as giving us opportunity to reflect on our final pastoral principle that of paying attention to power.

It is interesting that here we are, on a day that has been long known as Palm Sunday, but John is the only gospel to report that people actually brought palms. Matthew, Mark and Luke report that the crowd laid their cloaks or garments on the ground, with Matthew and Mark also saying that the crowd laid leafy branches on the road. But I guess Cloak Sunday or Garment on the Road Sunday, or Leafy Branch Sunday doesn't have the same ring of Palm Sunday.

There is a reason that the people brought palm branches. This was not insignificant. A palm was a symbol of victory. To wave a palm was to make

a statement. It was kind of like waving a flag. This was the way that one welcomed a king, welcomed a hero, welcomed a conquering general. It was a way to announce Jesus' coming triumph.

And it was also, in a sense, a form of protest. It was political speech. You might think of it as a parade, but you could just as well think of it as a protest, a demonstration. (We have seen lots of both of these in this past 12 months too.) Instead of signs and banners, the crowd carried palms. The message wasn't lost on anybody. Jesus had come to town, but others were also coming into town. Roman soldiers entered on horses, armed in a display of power. A conquering ruler would enter on a white stallion. Jesus? He sat on a donkey. This was a different kind of king. But the crowds welcomed him with symbols of triumph and really, a statement of defiance and resistance.

Was it triumph? Was it victory? The crowd thought so. They thought they understood. But they had no idea. The crowd actions said that Jesus was entering the city in triumph, as a king. They were sort of right. But they were also deeply wrong.

In less than a week in one of the most interesting conversations ever about power Pilate asks Jesus, *"Why do you refuse to speak to me?" "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"* But Jesus replied, *"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."*

In a sense, the whole of Holy Week and for that matter, the whole of the gospel is about power. For Rome, for Pilate, power really meant the ability to kill people. Get in the way of Rome, violate Roman law, fail to pay your taxes, and the ultimate Roman answer was violence. Throughout its vast empire, from Persia to Spain, Roman law was built on the threat of Roman swords, Roman crucifixion, Roman slavery. Just as Jesus had come into Jerusalem on a donkey, Roman soldiers had entered Jerusalem mounted on horses, Roman standards held high. It was a show of the military power and might of Rome, which was not to be challenged.

Jesus represented an entirely different kind of power, and Pilate doesn't know what to make of it. It scares him, it threatens him, just as it threatened the Jewish religious leaders.

Pilate represented coercive power – power over. Power to threaten, power to harm, power to abuse. Power used in the service of one's own self. In the temptation in the desert, Satan had tempted Jesus to use his power for his own purposes. But Jesus rejected that kind of power and that use of power.

Jesus did not use power over, but power alongside others, power for the sake of others. His was a power to heal, a power to build up. He uses the

power of story, or parable, to teach and inspire and convict and transform. He uses social power, relational power to welcome outcasts and touch people on the margins. And so, he breaks bread with tax collectors and sinners and people of questionable reputations. He uses the power of forgiveness and the power of acceptance to change lives.

And there was a great power in knowing who he was and what he was about. Pilate, the one who would seem to have all the power, is the one who is unsure, the one who is on the defensive. Pilate is backed by the power of Rome, but Jesus embodies the power of God.

Now, we can give power a bad name. Aspiring to power sounds un-Christian. But I think that is because when we think of power, we think of Pilate's kind of power, coercive kind of power, rather than Jesus' kind of power, relational power. To make changes in the community, you have to have power. Power is not a bad thing in and of itself. Power is the way we get things done. The fact is, we all have power, maybe more than we realize. There are bumper stickers that say, "I'm a teacher - what's your superpower?" or "I'm a nurse - what's your superpower?" Maybe it's a question worth asking. "What's your superpower?" We all have power. We all have influence, we all have capability to bring change, to make things happen to accomplish important things.

As parents, spouses, children, grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends, community members, neighbours, employees, voters, church members—every one of us has some measure of power. How do we claim that power, and how do we choose to use that power? Inequalities of power have led to abuses in the past and will continue to do so unless all who exercise pastoral care reflect continuously on the power that they hold. Power must always be acknowledged. It is a sad reflection on our society that it is not an uncommon in workplaces of all sizes that many individuals having witnessed, or experienced maltreatment have had it suggested to them that it would be better not to mention anything 'if you want to get on.' Those who do continue to call out inequalities or injustice are then called 'brave' or 'courageous'. We need to tackle the cultural context that means that such bravery and courage is required in the first place. We need to stop trying to 'fix the silenced' and rather 'fix the system'. This requires us to focus more time and resources on enabling those who are in perceived positions of power to skilfully invite those silenced to speak and then in turn to listen up themselves. It requires us to question and disrupt the very way we socially construct power at work.

Palm Sunday is a fantastic day to examine this topic. For this is ultimately what Jesus does he turn upside down perceived social constructs, he undo's

preconceived concepts of power and asks us to re-examine ourselves using God's values not human ones.

Remember Jesus' words to Pilate? "*You would have no power if it were not given from above.*" Because of our understanding that Christ calls us in humility to regard others as better than ourselves we should not exploit any perceived or real power over others. We should aim to be the sort of community where everyone seeks to serve one another in the Spirit of Christ and to respond joyfully to his call to mutual submission.

It is not right that pastoral encounters still take place without awareness of disparities of power. Matters relating to identity, sexuality, gender and relationships are deeply personal. Conversations relating to them must be carried out with utmost sensitivity to the real or perceived power that one may have over another. We need to learn to become more aware both of our own power and of our vulnerability to the perceived power of others, and to notice and call out when power is exercised inappropriately.

The Apostle Paul had a weakness, something he described as a "*thorn in the flesh,*" and prayed for it to be taken away. But the answer was, "My power is made perfect in weakness." Power in weakness is a completely different kind of power than the power Pilate understood. But it is real.

In a recent papal address, Pope Francis noted that the COVID-19 crisis, "*exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our project, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities.*"

Of course, we ought to seek prudently to minimize the damage of the coronavirus storm to lives and livelihood. But if we simply try to work our way out of it through our own cleverness, we will have failed to learn the lesson of Palm Sunday. The path to salvation is not one of self-assertion, of relying on our own greatness, but instead, through acknowledging our absolute dependence upon God. Ultimately in just 4 days' time we will recall how Jesus was turned over to be crucified. It appeared that the powers of this world had won. But there was power found in weakness. There was power in the cross, "*and by his stripes we are healed.*"

How can we encourage vulnerability in our relationship and look for ways of modelling it appropriately?

- To have honesty in listening to others and not to turn the conversation round to your own experiences.
- Accept what is being shared and make an offer to listen and journey together.
- Being vulnerable to your own vulnerability - to overcome fear and worry by being kind to yourself.
- In pastoral context: not standing over and doing things to people – it's about drawing alongside. Not just doing things for others - Have to be willing to admit ask for help -TRUST
- Being open in the workplace – being willing to admit you don't have answers – ask others.
- Jesus making himself vulnerable – no expectation of personal gain.
- Learn from own errors and experience – “know thyself”.
- Recognise the power we all have and how there are different power relationships: don't exploit.
- Listen and don't respond automatically with your story: empathy, NOT projecting your own issues.
- Active listening – without pushing our own viewpoint.
- Maybe it is not vulnerability that is needed but humility.
- People in power must listen intently.
- We are all in different power structures in different contexts. Power should never protect people from accountability.

