

SUNDAY 6A BIRKENHEAD 2017

Have you ever stopped and just watched children play? I remember being at a gathering once where a little girl was playing with her doll. Her brother had been pushing a car around. Nobody noticed him and he seemed to tire of what he was doing. When his sister put her doll down he kicked it. The girl squealed "Don't kick her. She's mine. She's Lucy. She's Lucy." The boy kept kicking and shouted back "It's not Lucy. It's only a thing. It's only a thing."

Often in films or on TV when someone is about to be harmed they are called names first. Dog, pig, bitch, vermin and so on. After the name calling the oppressors can do their work.

It seems to be necessary to reduce a person to the level of an object, a thing, or an undesirable animal, before we can kick them or harm them. If another person is seen as a human being, someone of equal worth, its very difficult to damage them. They have to be reduced to less than human in order to do them harm.

2

Not only does this harm the person who is kicked, it also destroys the humanity of the person doing the kicking.

Unfortunately this attitude is not confined to children at play, nor to film and TV. Nor is it just part of those we read about who do violence to others in our community. We all do it.

We can reduce people to less than human by the way we talk about them. Then we can kick them. Oh! Not physically, but in other ways. We kick them by excluding them, gossiping, ensuring they do not receive any credit where it is due. We can also demean people for the colour of their skin, their accent or even their sexuality.

This is about Christian morality. Can we see our own value and worth as human being in order to see the value and worth of others?

Morality is the subject of today's gospel and how unpalatable it is too!

Jesus said "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfil."

Morality, it seems, is to do with keeping the law.

But Jesus had such a strange attitude to the law. He healed on the Sabbath, and the law said not to. When invited to a meal, Jesus deliberately omitted the ritual washing required by law. When the disciples plucked corn on the Sabbath, Jesus justified his action by referring to King David who had done the same. Jesus touched a leper and that was contrary to the law. He also told the cleansed leper to offer his gift of thanks as required by the law. Jesus seems to treat the law in his own way. He seems to be telling us that relieving human need comes before keeping the law.

Time and again Jesus tried to get people to look beyond the letter of the law. Keeping rules is one thing. Understanding why we keep them is another. The understanding is just as important as the law itself. Jesus encouraged people to look at life as more than keeping laws. "You have heard that it was said....but I say to you..."

And yet again Jesus uses the Law in a new way. So to treat others harshly is like murder. To look with lust at another is like adultery. Jesus suggests that the attitude we hold towards others is as important as the actions we perform.

I think Jesus use of the Law helps us to see that we cannot take Jewish Laws of the first century and apply them to NZ in 2017. The law needs to be interpreted in each age. And to interpret the law we need to look at the principle behind the law. Jesus expounds a simple principle for our morals. We need to look at our attitude towards others and our attitude towards ourselves.

Jesus asks us to treat people as human beings of equal worth, not as objects for our own use. We are not to call them names and reduce them to less than human. We are asked to give others the dignity and worth that is their right. Then we will not act immorally with them.

The ability to treat others as fully human lies behind all moral action. It is rather extraordinary then that we now have a world leader in Trump who does not seem to treat others as fully human. There is in our world an increasing intolerance of those who are different to ourselves. Jesus calls us to respond, to be people who see the dignity and worth of all human beings. It is a tough calling, and a complex one with many difficult questions. Questions such as what do we do with the almost overwhelming amount of refugees in our world? What about national security? Is there enough to go round for everyone? There are no easy answers to these questions.

But there is something we can do. We can start with ourselves – to see ourselves as fully human and acceptable to God; to see ourselves as loved unconditionally by God.

God invites us today to see ourselves as important people of dignity and worth. In this Eucharist we are accepted and loved by God. We share this meal together as people equal. If we experience this love and acceptance and see ourselves as people of dignity, then chances are we will treat others as important to God too. We will not need to call them names or kick them by our attitudes. They will be seen as people of worth and value to God in whose image they are made.