

Over the last decade or so we have frequently heard the phrase “back to basics” and we are being asked to consider ways in which this can be achieved in our every day lives.

In Christian terms “Back to basics” takes us to one of the best known verses of Scripture and probably the first verse I learnt in Sunday School. You will forgive me for quoting it in the Authorised version but that is how I learnt it. John Ch 3 verse 16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life”.

The key word is Love. It is this which is the basis of the relationship of the Christian to God.

Those of you who have had anything to do with children will be familiar with the phrase “IT’S NOT FAIR” Adults have the tendency to adopt this reaction too when things don’t go just as they had planned.

Often we are so taken up with the fairness of getting what we perceive to be our rights that mercy and compassion are pushed aside and we become harsh and critical about other peoples’ failings and ways of life.

As Christians, St Paul says in his letter to the Romans we “have received the spirit of adoption. When we cry “Abba, Father’ it is that Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God”

If God has, through his infinite loving grace, adopted us, fallen and damaged human beings, as his children, how can we do other than follow his example in the way we treat others.

Let's face it, families don't always agree but if love prevails they can learn to live together in harmony despite their differences.

That means turning away from acts or even thoughts of revenge; it means always moderating fairness with compassion.

And not setting our selves up in judgement of others.

It is very easy for prejudice to influence our outlook on life. Sometimes it is inbred from early Childhood, sometimes it is taught and unquestioningly learnt from the culture in which we live. But if we are to follow Christ's example, we must leave prejudice and bigotry behind.

In recent years the church has gone through a number of crises.

The fundamentalists, against the traditionalists, and both of them opposed to the liberals, the lobby for women's ordination and those in favour of Women Bishops and the particular groups who are fervently opposed.

The gay rights movements and those who condemn homosexuality as a sin: those who agree with divorcees remarrying in church and those who say it is against God's laws. And more recently the Black Lives Matter demonstrations and the increasing awareness of the re-emergence of anti-Semitism. In all of this the love and compassion of God is so often forgotten.

Prejudice inhibits love and hinders kindness.

We all harbour a certain degree of small mindedness. It may be concerned with colour or creed, social status or gender orientation, or it may be much more subtle than that, related to behaviour or occupation, or the lack of it; The homeless, the unemployed, the refugee and the asylum seeker. Disapproval of "the younger generation" or marginalisation of the elderly

What ever the group, we need to remember that Jesus calls us to love as he loved. And that means through God's grace learning to understand and accept those who's deeply held convictions differ from our own.

Bruce Kenrick writing about his experiences ministering in the slums in the 1960s said this:

"We classify men good and bad. We range them before our judgement seat and say, "You are a saint, and you are a sinner; all this group are sinners. You and you and.... But there we stop, for this man standing down among the sinners has nail prints in his hands...He looks at us: we

feel uneasy on our throne: we are afraid: He's judging us."

It is politically incorrect nowadays to sing the old chorus "Jesus died for all the children, all the children of the world" but it contains an important truth when it goes on to remind us that all are precious in his sight.

That means whatever their race, colour, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or age. So "It is not for us to take God's judgement into our own incapable hands but to recognise with humility that we all stand condemned were it not for the amazing merciful love of God which has set us free." *Sears*.

Christ died for all humanity, that we all might become God's children by adoption and grace. And be transformed from "death's slaves to God's children." That means transforming our attitude towards others not just to a position of tolerance but to one of acceptance and concern. We are called to love as Christ loves us.

I would like to read you a poem written by a nurse about a drug addict, who lived on the streets of London, which illustrates this sort of acceptance.

It's called The Hero.

He was badly burned when they brought him in
There was nothing that we could do
But ease his pain and sit with him

Until the night was through
He had saved a child from a burning house,
He was just a passer-by,
But he rushed into a blazing room
When he heard a baby cry.
He was young and thin and his hair was long
And when they searched his clothes
They found a hypodermic and a book called Randy Rose
He was a junkie, some one said
And they no doubt were right,
But we were proud to nurse him
When he died with us that night.
(Poem by Mary Deeping)