

No deep theology today, just a lovely penny-drop moment to share.

I've spent a lot of time in the Gospels in the past few years, and especially in the sermon on the mount. And that's where I was this morning when there was a heavy "Clunk!" sound – well, it was a heavy sound but it lightened my morning!

Now, I know that when you're thinking about something, you can read it into the text you're looking at. And yes, I have been rather struck (to put it mildly) by the fact that God, in his very essence, is relationship, but I don't think I'm making this up...

I mean, look at what Jesus says about prayer in Matt 6. He was clearly talking about what we, singular, should do in terms of prayer, because he says "go into your room", and talks about what we say to God "in secret". And what should we say? How should we pray when we're on our own? "**Our** father..." and in all the rest of the Lord's prayer, there's not a single "I" or "me".

And can you just imagine how the Pharisees would have reacted to that?! "**Our father...**" Do you think the Pharisees thought of God as a loving father, or rather as a holy and dreadful God with whom you had to be very careful, lest you did the wrong thing. But I digress, and this isn't the penny-drop...

It was actually Matt 7 that I was reading, not 6, but having read, I then started to pray, and as I very often do now, I started with the "Our father", and I didn't get beyond saying those first two words!

Anyway, chapter 7 is very relationship based, starting with (not) judging others... (Mind you, I wasn't sure what the pearls and swine bit was doing in there – any ideas, anyone?). Anyway, it's then into our attitude to prayer, with ask, seek, knock. So if we see God as a loving father, it changes how we pray because God knows what we need before we ask...

Then "Clang!" – no not "Clunk!" This wasn't a penny-drop but a "What's that doing there?!" moment.

In the middle of the paragraph (yes, I know Greek didn't have paragraphs, but the English does) comes a "So" (often an important word, so I'm told by preachers) "**So** do to others what you would have them do to you" – what they call "The Golden Rule". But **why** does that old (it's very old, isn't it? and occurs in other religions, doesn't it?) piece of advice follow as a "therefore" from knowing that God is a loving, giving heavenly father? Well, I guess it's another example of how relationship is central to everything.

But I've cheated you! I've stopped mid sentence..."So do to others what you would have them do to you... because..." Why? Can you remember what comes next? Clue: what other issue has been heavily exercising me of late? [Scroll down to find out]

“So do to others what you would have them do to you... because... **this sums up the Law and the Prophets.**”

Jesus is saying that the Scriptures they had in their hands in his day had an overall purpose, and it was a purpose that he said he had come to **fulfil**, and that was to enable us to live in love with him and with one another.

This makes reading the Old Testament so much easier – gives it a much more helpful focus.

But contrast Jesus’ attitude to the Scriptures with what the Pharisees thought was the whole point of the Scriptures: to show us exactly how we should live, to avoid offending God and risking getting zapped. And the Pharisees’ job, they saw, was to find out exactly what God wanted and make sure that other people knew. But let’s be kind to them; they **were** trying to help people; they thought they were doing what God wanted (and remember that Saul was a zealous Pharisee).

And contrast it also with my attitude as a 20th century Pharisee, trying to find out what the Bible (now including the New Testament) says about how we can bridge that terrible gulf between a holy God and an unholy me, and how Jesus’ death on the cross formed a bridge across which we could (well, crawl, presumably) to get to God on the other side. And I was also keen to keep Christian principles alive in society today by showing people what’s right and what’s wrong – all with good motives, of course.

Some of you may remember one curate at Holy Trinity. He was very well versed in the Scriptures, but he was unhappy. Suddenly, everyone said, “What’s happened to John?!” His sermons were amazing, he was so excited, and in a prayer meeting, there was no way we could have that awful thing where someone says, “Let’s pray” and then it starts “Dear God please do this, and that and give us this and that.” No, with John it was, “Dear God, it’s so wonderful to be here with you. Thank you so much for all you’ve done for us, etc, etc.”

And I remember a time when we listened to a series of talks by Colin Urquhart, called, “How to love and be loved”. One day I went into a bank and the cashier said, “Gosh you look happy today” and I said, “I’ve just realised how much God loves me!” and then added, “Oh, and he loves you too.”

And I remember a time when I read a book by Mark Stibbe (I think) about adoption and once again my heart was stirred.

So God has tried several times to tell me he loves me, but it’s taken me such a long time to take it on board.

May God bless you with his incredible love and make you a blessing to everyone you meet today.

Paul Bev. 8.9.18

P.S. I’m putting this down here because it’s so negative, but I Googled, “How can I be saved?”; I looked at the first site I was offered and its very first statement was, “Leave everybody out of it; it’s between you and God.” I kid you not!

