

Dear Friends,

Matthew 5: 43-48

Jesus sees all the commands as being held together in these two, love God and love your neighbour. Who is the neighbour you are to love? Come close to Jesus and he will show you.

For example, he tells you the story of The Good Samaritan. This reminds you that your neighbours are not only those from your own group, those with whom you feel comfortable and safe. They are also those who are less familiar, the ones with whom at first, you may feel a little unsettled. Your experience teaches you that when you get through your initial awkwardness, you find that there are rich blessings in getting to know those from different backgrounds. You are at your best when you go beyond "us" and "them" to the place where there is only "us".

Jesus however takes love even further. He teaches you not only to embrace people in all their variety, he also gives you one of the hardest commandments when he says "Love your enemy". If you were able to love as generously and whole heartedly as that surely you would be perfect. Which, it just so happens, is what Jesus also instructs you to be in this passage. He says "Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect". What can Jesus be asking? Not absolute perfection that's for sure. If he wants that he is going to be very disappointed and if you put that expectation on yourself, you will soon break under the pressure.

I wonder if what Jesus is actually giving you is a role model. People in every age ask themselves "How am I to live?" Many answer that question by choosing someone they admire and imitating them. They make someone their role model. They did that in the time of Jesus as they do it now. The suggestion of Jesus is that you go straight to the top and make God your role model. He says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"; he also says that when you love your enemies you become children of your Father in heaven. The expectation was that there would be a family resemblance between parents and children; children would be chips off the old block. A child of the heavenly Father would therefore resemble God by doing the things that God does. So, make God your role model, imitate God by being perfect. Be a child of God by loving your enemy.

Obviously, there are limits. There are many ways in which you cannot imitate God, but there are ways in which you can. Your task is to find out what God's attitudes are and adopt them; to discern God's ways and follow them; to work out how God treats people and treat them in the same way. The passage gives us some clues that point us in possible directions. We will look at those clues next time.

God bless you,

Tony