

Sermon for Lent 1 – By Canon Tom Kennar, Rector

One of the real delights about moving house is that you tend to discover just how dirty your home is. You have much loved items of furniture, which you've lived happily alongside for years – and then you move them. Suddenly, you see all the dust and grease that has accreted around them. No longer the loved items of furniture you've happily lived with...they are festering piles of goo...and you have to overcome the urge to take them all to the tip and start again!

Take my freezer, for example. I have been cheerfully loading and unloading bags of food from my freezer for years. But it was only this week that I noticed that all around the edge of the door, a dirty film of filth has accumulated. How did it get there? It's not as though I've been wiping lumps of ice-cream up and down the edge of the door every time I use it! But there it was, a great sticky mass of slime, that had to be scraped off with a knife, and one of those green washing-up pads.

You see, I couldn't just leave it there. I had been alerted to a new reality. No longer was my freezer the bright shiny receptacle for lovely things that I had always believed it to be. Suddenly, I had been given a very different view of it...I had to wake up and smell the coffee. I had to get real. I had to turn around the way I looked at my freezer, and embrace the reality of the situation.

When Jesus came along, and cried out 'repent' – he meant something similar. He wasn't thinking about freezers, of course! The word he used was 'metanoia' – which has many complex layers of meaning. But those meanings coalesce around the notion of turning around,

facing in a new direction, changing one's mind about things. Our English word 'repent' doesn't really do justice to metanoia. Repentance is about feeling sorry for past actions. It's a Middle English word with a Latin and Old French root – paenitere (pen –i-tere) – which was all about feeling remorseful.

But Jesus was calling for something rather more radical than just feeling sorry. In fact Jesus didn't seem to be all that interested in remorse. To the woman caught in adultery he simply said 'Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more'. Rather, Jesus was calling for a complete change of mind. He wanted his followers to wake up and see the world for what it really is.

You see, most of us go around with quite a complex set of delusions, about the world, about other people, and about ourselves. Jesus' radical notion was that we should begin to see those things as God sees them; not as we limited human beings perceive them through our limited eyes, ears and brains.

Jesus had a short-hand for the way God sees the world...he called it 'God's Kingdom'. When we begin to glimpse the world, ourselves and other people as God sees them; then we begin to live as people of the Kingdom.

Let's do a little thought-experiment together. What do you think the world is like? The answer you give to yourself will depend a great deal on your experiences of the world. If you have only ever lived on a tropical island, with food hanging ripe from every tree, then the world will seem a pretty wonderful place. If, on the other hand, you

have lived in a dry desert, or had your house torn apart by a tornado, your view of the world will be something quite different.

The reality, of course is that the world is something else altogether. We need to look realistically at the world. God didn't create the world to give you and me a luxury dwelling, and a guaranteed safe future: he made it to offer us challenges, to help us grow spiritually and emotionally, as we learn how to care for each other, for other species, for the very environment of the Earth as much as God cares for them.

Let's try another thought experiment. Picture in your mind someone who really annoys you. They might be a family member. They might be a church member! Hopefully, on my first Sunday, none of you are thinking about me yet! Let yourself, just for a moment, feel some of the anger that you have about that person. Aren't they just so annoying?! They are so smug! They always think they are right! They never say sorry! They have no concept of how much they hurt me that time! And now...Stop.

Stop and wonder how God sees them. Could it be that God sees them as a Father sees a child? Could it be that God sees them as still needing to grow into all that they can be? Could it be that God sees all the things they've been through in their life that has made them like they are? God was watching when they were taught how to behave by a dysfunctional parent. God was there when they were abused, or bullied, or deprived, or used. God saw how the character they have today is a result of all that they have been through and the environment in which they first grew.

And how does God react to them?

God loves them. Those 'other people' – especially the ones who really rile you – they are not saints. But that doesn't stop God loving them, nor caring for them, nor wanting them to grow as human beings to become all they can become.

And that's also how much God loves you! With all your faults and human weakness. God loves you. Get rid of that delusion that you are somehow perfect...that weird delusion that you've never done anything to upset anyone (which is where your anger about other people comes from). In the eyes of God, you and I are no better than anyone else...and possibly a little bit worse than some. Yet he still loves us. By offering us the free gift of forgiveness, he restores our self-respect. He removes the need to justify ourselves.

In Lent, Jesus encourages us to 'Get real' about ourselves. Only when we've learned to see ourselves as God sees us, and learned to see the world as God sees it, will we ever truly understand what it means to 'Love our neighbours as we love ourselves'.

Get real, in Lent. Turn around, and see the world as it really is. Wake up and smell the coffee. Then, you will be eager to love your neighbours. Then you will be eager to pass on some of the love you have experienced in Christ.

The kingdom of God has come near. Turn around, repent, and believe the Good News. Get real about yourself, the world and others. Forget the dream world of self-created fantasies, and join in with God's activity in the real world he created – which is the only place where true joy can be found. Amen