

Sun 28th - Why are we talking about sexuality? - why is it important, what the issues?

2 Cor 5:11 - 21

John 15:12 - 17

My command is love one another.

Tertulian c.ad 160–c.225. Roman 'Look,' they say, 'how they [Christians] love one another'

Whether its Recreate or the Coffee Shop what speaks most loudly to the outside world is the way we treat other people and each other. In these conversations about sensitive subjects, lets remember to treat one another kindly, gently, with respect and honour and love. Especially when we're disagreeing. And if I get a bit rowdy - I give you permission to tell me to calm down!

And "I have called you friends. You did not choose me, I chose you."

We sometimes think "I chose to come to church, to this church rather than that church - I am choosing who to sit next to - whether I agree with the sermon or the people..."

Fools! Jesus says that's not true. God chose you, and me, to be here, and now, with these people. And... God chose that person to be here as well. You know which one! So how are you going to deal with that!

Had an interesting discussion at counselling about difference - gender, sexuality, heteronormative, Trans, bi, ase.

All words that I wasn't familiar with a short while ago

For some they make us uncomfortable - squirm. Its embarrassing, perhaps its not British.

One person said - I'm fine with gay couple and I have have gay friends, but when it comes to raising children I struggle to find it ok

Another said - I don't mind what gender people identify with, but its not ok to identify with a different race

This was an extraordinarily brave and honest and trusting space

I don't expect us to get to that level of conversation - but I use it illustrate that there is a range of opinions - whether or not you call yourself a Christian or not.

I also use to it illustrate that in all works of life, people are trying to work out how to negotiate these changes. The world has changed radically since Freud and Jung did their theories, and so the therapeutic profession is trying to work out where it fits, what it thinks.

Its the same in and medical profession, or the legal profession, or schools.

The world has changed, our culture has changed

When I grew up - gay was a choice, or an illness - most of you are older than me
Yet, in the last 20 to 30 years things have changed enormously. Not only is it ok to be gay - its ok to be married.

My epiphany, was at St Martins in the Bullring in Birmingham, meeting people who were gay and christian. And they felt stuck and trapped - they hadn't chosen God - God chose them, they wanted faith - but the gay community hated Christians. And they hadn't chosen to be gay, they just were, but the Christian community hated gay people. And some of these people were in a terrible way - caught on both sides - you wouldn't choose that. And sadly, for some, they thought their only choice was to take their own life.

Yeah - you wouldn't choose to be gay Simon.

So the world has changed, culture has changed, and the church has traditionally, like all other parts of society, not been ok with lesbian, gay, or anything.

So there's a gap between the church and christian culture and the world
Because there's a gap - we notice the difference

(Don't get this gap with and introduction of the telephone or being left handed)

So we can tell that this difference is more important. It means something more for christians and the church, and it means something more for the world and culture.

And this gap.. makes us question

- our side - why are we here

Their side - why are they their, what's going on

Now you might say - that's ok, they're the world, we're the church - the gap doesn't matter (I know you won't say that!) - we don't think the church should be an island - like those monasteries in Greece on and top of rocks - remote, cut off, inaccessible.

Paul reminds us in Corinthians - God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ - God wants to cross that gap so badly that Jesus came to bridge the gap between heaven and earth - and we are Christ's ambassadors, preaching a message of reconciliation to those who are far off and those who are near.

So we have to think about this gap..

And to give us some hope and boldness, let me tell you tell you about other gaps that the church has faced and worked out in its history.

Acts - The church is Jewish. You have to be a Jew to follow Jesus Christ.

But most of the world is Gentile. Can you be a Gentile and a Christian? How do we bridge those worlds.

- What food is ok? There are all sorts of rules in the bible about food, and traditions
- can you be a Christian and eat pork, or food that might have been offered in a temple?

2nd Century - Jesus said - turn the other cheek, overcome hatred with love - but many people are in the Roman army - its a big employer. Many Christians were leaving the army because they were pacifists. They didn't want to kill people, or support an oppressive regime. Another gap between the world and the faith. Can you be a Christian and in the roman army?

Jump forward 400 years to 633. There's Christians in Britain who are Celts, with their own organisation, worship, and patterns, and Christians who are from and Pope in Rome. Can you be a Celt and a Christian? How do we bridge the gap

Jump to 1500 - the invention of the printing press. People could read!! Should they be allowed to read the bible? Lots of people said - we want to read the bible, we don't speak latin or greek - give us the bible! And others said - no, they'll read it wrong, its not right. People were killed over this. - by the church authorities. It was the biggest gap between culture and the church for hundreds of years!

One more -

When missionaries went to Africa in the 19th Century they faced a big gap between the church culture and belief and the culture of Africa. God had told them to go, it was important that Jesus salvation was offered to all. Some translated the bible into local languages, but not all - that gap was still rumbling on. Ok it was possible for gentiles and even soldiers to be christians, but what about some African tribe? Could you be African and a christian?

I'm not sure how to answer.

They let chieftains marry as many wives as they want - so yes, they carried on their culture

But to worship - they had to use the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, the king James bible, and in and middle of the heat of Africa had to wear cassock and surplus and all the things it was essential for people to wear in England.

Even today, if you go to Africa, they will say - you cannot drink beer and be a christian, very strict.

So we're at this place - sexuality - this gap - between the world around us and the church, and we have to work out what do to do with it.

Beuase its not going to go away.

It matters, its important.

Not only do most of us have friends or family who are lesbian or gay, or know of couples and individuals - actually **all** of us know someone who is gay, but they may not have told you, or anyone, becuase they still fear your reaction.

So here's the plan...

Next Sunday, we're going to learn about the other side of the gap - what's going on in the world! What do all those letters - LGBTMNOPQ mean? Why are people so het up about it?

The Sunday after, we're going to consider why the church is on this side of the gap - what are our beliefs and where do they come from, and do we all think the same?!

After Messy Church, when we meet here on the 26th May we're going to look at the Bible and Sexuality - what it says, what it doesn't say, how people come to different places

Finally at the beginning of June we're going to talk about how we can live with difference, is it possible to disagree and still love each other?

And.. because I don't want this to be some lecture series where I tell you what to think.. everyone has an opinion about this, everyone's view is important - on Wednesday evenings I'm going to run a thing called Table Talk, in the church hall, where we sit down, with no agenda and can just share our stories and listen to each other and discuss. So that will start this Wednesday, and everyone's invited - so if all the chapel and village come we'll have to change venue!

And on Weds 8th May - as a special treat - a friend of mine who is a trans woman is coming to tell her story and journey, including how she ended up an Anglican priest. And she's very open and non-defensive and will love taking your questions.

It says in 1 John that Perfect Love casts out Fear - so let's not give in to suspicion or gossip, but live as children of the light, and boldly, and with care, talk about these things that seem so central to many people's lives and yet cause such pain and confusion. Let Jesus love surround all we do.