

Mark 12:28-31 James 3:1-6

This is such a well-known passage and needs very little explanation. However, I do want to take a glimpse at this passage in light of our theme for today – ‘respect.’ If you think about it, it is nigh impossible to love anyone without respecting them. I cannot think of any situation where that might be the case. So what is respect?

Respect is honouring the worth or dignity in a person. It is acknowledging that a person, whoever it may be in any particular situation, is worthy of our attention.

I believe respect is an innate need of being human. I believe respect goes a long way towards defining love in the Christian sense. In our reading Jesus tells us that the two most important commandments are to love God and to love our neighbour. The two words I would use to define love in this sense are ‘care’ and ‘respect.’ As human beings our sense of self-worth, our sense of well-being come from feeling cared for and feeling respected for who we are, no matter our faults. Jesus understood this very well.

When we use language that conveys a lack of respect we hurt, we demean, we undermine a person’s sense of well-being, their dignity. I have to ask myself, would I like to be called a loser? No. Would I like to be called dumb? No. Do I enjoy being spoken to in an unpleasant or condescending manner? No. Then why on earth would I want to speak to someone in a similar way?

This is what Jesus meant when he asks us to ‘love our neighbours as ourselves,’ in other words, in the same way we would want to be treated. It is not rocket science but all too often we get it wrong.

Conversely, when we praise or compliment someone, we enhance their dignity and their feeling of self-worth. We are showing them respect, and so they feel valued.

The last point I want to make about respect is this – when you show respect to someone, you actually make a very important statement about yourself. I read this recently. ‘There are those who see respect as something that is beneficial to the other person on the receiving end, rather than something that is beneficial to the one who is giving the respect. But that is not quite correct, because the person who is capable of discerning respect and giving it to others, is the one who stands tall, if not taller.’ In other words, the virtue of respect enhances the

person who gives it as much as the person who receives it. And, of course, it is just as relevant in reverse. In the end, those who demean others only demean and disrespect themselves. Think about it – do you really look up to someone who is negative towards other people? I don't think so. And that is because their negativity, their tendency to put down others actually speaks volumes about themselves.

James makes a very good point in our second reading – *'We all make mistakes, but those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way.'* James 3:2. He makes the point that the way we speak about others says a great deal about ourselves.

There is another issue which falls under same umbrella, and that is the issue of gossip. I think it is one of the most common human failings, to indulge in gossip. It panders to our insecurities because deep down we feel better about ourselves when we hear not such nice things being said about someone else. We are all guilty at times because we are all human.

Joseph Conrad said, *'Gossip is what no one claims to like, but everybody enjoys.'*

There is the story of four ministers from a small town who were out fishing in a boat. The fish were not biting so they were chatting away. Since they had counselled their parishioners for many years that confession was good for the soul, they decided they would practise what they had been preaching. Each decided to confess his secret sin to the others. The first said his great fault was language – he sometimes used profanity, when no-one was around, except God, of course. The second minister admitted that his weakness was money. He was quite materialistic and would look for the parish that was going to financially benefit him the most. The third minister admitted to an addiction to petty gambling on anything from golf to football.

The last minister, who was the helmsman on their boat, had, by this time, turned the boat toward the shore and had increased the speed. One of his fellow ministers asked him, "What's the hurry? Besides, you haven't made your confession yet?" The minister replied, 'Well, you see, my sin is gossip, and I can't wait to get home!'

In the same way as the use of our tongues says a lot about our character, so does gossip. There is a very pertinent verse in Proverbs, *'Wrongdoers listen to wicked talk; liars pay attention to destructive words.'* Proverbs 17:4.

In ancient Greece, Socrates was reputed to hold knowledge in

high esteem. One day, an acquaintance met the great philosopher and said, 'Do you know what I just heard about your friend?'

'Hold on a minute,' Socrates replied. 'Before telling me anything I'd like you to pass a little test. It's called the Triple Filter Test. It goes like this. Before you talk to me about my friend, it might be a good idea to take a moment and filter what you're going to say. That's why I call it the triple filter test. The first filter is Truth. Have you made absolutely sure what you are about to tell me is true? Have you checked it out?'

'No', the man said, 'Actually I just heard about it and...'

'Alright', said Socrates. 'So you don't really know if it's true or not. Now let's try the second filter, the filter of Goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good?'

'Well, no, on the contrary.' 'So', continued Socrates, 'you want to tell me something bad about him, but you're not certain it's true. You may still pass the test though, because there's one filter left: the filter of Usefulness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend going to, be useful to me?'

'No, not really.' 'Well', concluded Socrates, 'if what you want to tell me is neither true nor good nor even useful, why tell it to me at all?'

Let me finish with a lovely quote from Billy Graham, '*A real Christian is a person who can happily give his pet parrot to the town gossip.*'

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