

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

17th June 2018

Exodus 19:1-6, 20:17

Spirit... may we find you in the words we use... the imagination we have... the silences we keep... may we know your inspiration in the times we wait on you... and find you long us... Amen

This week I discovered a truly remarkable fact... apparently 513 people want to be friends with me... What makes this a truly remarkable statistic is... I didn't know there were as many as 513 people who knew me... But it must be true... because facebook tells me...

513 people have sent a request to be my friend... I haven't yet decided if I want to be friends with any of them... so I went through the whole list and discovered three people from China whose names are in Chinese characters so I can't pronounce them... far too many Harry Potter fans... and a dog called Bramble... who seems to have her own facebook page...

Of the 513 people champing at the bit to tell the world Roddy Hamilton is now their friend... and whose online status will certainly be guaranteed to soar... I recognise the names of precisely 21... 17 I haven't seen in as many years... leaving only four people... one being my mother...

The tragic part is that every time I log onto facebook... the first thing I look at... is how many people have seen my posts... I'm talking of the church's facebook page... rather than my own... since even I don't visit that... The first thing I do is look to see how many people round the world... visited the page that day...

What happens with facebook and other social media is you are pulled into this need to post posts that will boost the number of visits to your page... rather than post just what is important to you...

The more likes... visits... friends we have... the more we value ourselves...

There has been some recent research done by social scientists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett... where they found that one of the key things that fuels inequality... is how

we perceive ourselves in relation to others... our popularity... our online presence... how we sit within that order...

As the gap between rich and poor increases... so does the tendency to define and value each other... in terms of superiority and inferiority...

Which is where the tenth commandment enters the discussion... because this is about the whole idea of envy... It seems to recognise 33 centuries ago... what we are struggling with as a society today... that the more unequal a society... the more we covet what others have... the more we define our worth in relation to others popularity... the more unhealthy our communities become...

So true is this that the tenth commandment... is as the heart of all the commandments... for when we define ourselves in relation to others... then you can see why there is violence... Whole nations are in conflict because one wants what another has... usually power or oil or something... Or stealing... they have what I want... adultery... it is me choosing to define myself... even secretly... in relation to someone else...

It is when we stop defining ourselves in relation to God... but define ourselves in relation to others... competition... strife... envy begin... Indeed might we go further... and suggest that when we define ourselves only in relation to others... then we are more vulnerable to mental illness... unhappiness... anxiety... and stress...

As a personal illustration... I often find... I place myself in the legacy of previous ministers... Let me just say... a congregation doesn't do that... this congregation certainly doesn't do that... only I do that to myself... But I lie in my bed and compare now to then... the numbers they had... the ease in which they seemed to fit their role... though I doubt any of them really did... or I compare us... to the congregation down the road... the things they do... the idea they had before we thought of it... and the whole church environment turns competitive... anxious about itself... and whose collective mental health is not good...

It's the tenth commandment laid bare... That longing to have what others have...

It can be subtle and dangerous... comparing ourselves in relation to others standing... their confidence... their certainty... their faith... The anxiety that comes from that envy... is unhealthy... stresses us... focusses us on they wrong things... makes us competitive... when in truth... we cannot compare... We are not like anyone else... We are uniquely ourselves... individually and as a community... and a fabulous and diverse community at that... which exists no where else... This combination of creative and wonderful people... exists no where else... Don't compare...

We aren't like anyone else... our heritage and story and hopes are so different from the church down the road... Our individual lives... cannot be compared to our neighbour... because who we are... comes from a unique combination of circumstances and gifts that only each of us have... and as a congregation... even more so... Don't compare the market...

A personal issue I have each year after a spring fair... or Christian Aid week... or annual review of giving... we compare how much we raised this year to last year...

It is not a fair comparison... It's not the same world... There is a different set of circumstances this year than there were last year... We're different people... some richer... some poorer... some not here... What is raised... is no more or less valuable than it was last year... It is a gift... Don't compare...

Which is the truth behind the whole commandment of coveting what others have... or even what we had this time last year... You shan't... because you can't... Who we are in creation right now... is like nothing and no one else...

That's the principle of the creation story so poetically imagined in Genesis 1... everything has its place... each of us has our own task and our own blessing... and each is loved as that and cherished by God...

Nothing is more pointless and destructive... than to let someone else's happiness diminish your own... which is what envy does... Consumer society is built on the creation and intensification of envy... which is why it leads to inequality... pursuit of online popularity... mental stress... and societal anxiety...

The antidote is to recognise God's blessing on who we are... this incredible community of folk... like no other... There is nothing to envy...

Envy just makes us victims of our own coveting... robbing ourselves of the joy and blessing of being fully who we are... in the life we live as a community...

The tenth commandment is ours to recognise... we need nothing else to be this community... no one else has... or can give... what we need... we are specifically called as these people... with these gifts... at this time... in this particular place... No one else can do what we do...

For a little fun we rewrote the ten commandments in scots... The tenth reads... Dinnae hanker efter whit ye cannae hae... but the more positive way of putting that is... wha's like us... gi'e few... true for every congregation... and community...

So let us celebrate who we are... rise to be all we shall yet be... support and befriend each other... in the unique diversity that is this congregation... who offers deeper and more generous friendship that facebook can possibly imagine...

Let us instead end the ten... in a commitment to share community in the ten ways... with God as focus... relationships honoured... responsibility towards others... to recognise we don't need to be anyone else but ourselves... to love neighbour and to love God... all underpinned by the truth... long before we get any of that right... God bears us on eagles wings... and brings us to Gods self... there is nothing to be envious about... God loves us first... and nothing can change that...

References

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