

There's 2 fish in a tank. One turns to the other and says – “so, can you drive this thing?”

I'm a big fan of a pun, or play on words – what some may call a dad joke. And the English language is ripe with words that can mean more than one thing, or sound the same, which means there is plenty of scope to fit them into a conversation – where appropriate, of course. But there is a serious edge to doing such wordplay – it reminds us that sometimes what we say is not always what is heard. And it's a reminder that just because we read something in a certain way, through the lens of our own experience or upbringing or tradition, that may not be how others read it, or even how it was meant for a given time or space in history.

A wonderful, wise Baptist minister friend tells the story of a visit he paid to a lady of advancing years who had moved into sheltered accommodation. She was happily chatting away, when she looked at him and said “Mind, I like you, but I'm not into any of that Jesus stuff. Not after what he said about kids.” Ron, the minister, asked what she meant. “Well, he wanted kids to suffer, didn't he. Says in the

Bible, “suffer the little children.” Not much of a compassionate God if he wants that.” Explanation, recognition and reconciliation followed, but this lady had missed out on a lifetime of being in communion, in a relationship with Jesus because of a misunderstanding over a single word.

This doesn't just apply to words either. In our Lent course last Tuesday we were reflecting on how we picture Jesus – what he may have looked like – and how he is depicted in art, on the silver screen and in our churches. And we realised that, while we know Jesus would have looked just like a man from Israel/Palestine, almost all of the images we are presented with of him show a handsome white guy, often with blue eyes. The wise folks of St Lawrence's that were exploring this came to the conclusion that we tend to imagine people in a way that is familiar to us, so those designing early artwork of Jesus in the West will have made him white, as that was what they knew.

But what does this mean for our understanding of scripture? Well, it's a reminder that we need to pay attention to the context of the time each

book of the Bible was written before we boldly claim “the Bible says this...!” And it also reminds us that, while God is imovable, unchangeable, omniscient – humanity is not, and his word speaks to us in different ways through the ages.

So our Old Testamnet reading today contains possibly the world’s best known set of instructions, given directly by God on the top of Mount Sinai while Moses, surrounded by smoke, shaken by trumpet blasts and rumbling thunder. These were far more than just top tips for a better prayer life or five bible verses that prove you’re right about cheese – they were part of the Torah, a Hebrew word we tend to see translated as Law, though some would argue would be better described as instruction, teaching or guidance. And the Israelites, by this point, were desperately in need of some guidance.

They had just been liberated from slavery in Egypt, they had been handed a great gift of freedom... and they really didn’t know what to

do with it. After the thrill of the escape through the Red Sea, after the image of the parted waves crashing back down over their oppressors had faded and the seemingly endless trudge through the desert lands had begun they fell into grumbling, wailing and moaning, even attacking Moses and Aaron for not leaving them as slaves in Egypt.

Because, if you think about it, slavery was all they knew. And that, I think, might give us something interesting to ponder as we consider this, and the rest of our readings, this morning.

All too often, the Ten Commandments are seen simply as God's gift of restraint upon our human tendency to sin, or as a measuring rod against which we are sure to come up short. But...what if the Law, the Torah is not only "Law," but also good news, in the way we would maybe view the New Testament? What if the words are not merely that, but are informed by the Living Word, Jesus himself, in not just bringing commandment and condemnation, but promise and liberation to

those who originally heard them, and to those who hear them now?

As we've already said, who is listening can inform how the words are heard – the experiences of the listener can impact on what is heard. So I wonder how the Israelites, as ex-slaves, heard the commandments. Because under God's law, these former slaves of the Egyptians would no longer be compelled to do their earthly masters' bidding.

What if all those “thou shalt not's” are really Good news, not only to the Children of Israel, but to us? What if “You shall not,” is a word of promise as well as a word of command? Could “You shall not,” be both Law and Good News?

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (*therefore*) you shall have no other gods before me. *You will not have to bow down before your master's gods, you will be free to worship your own god.*

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (*therefore*) you shall not murder, *you shall not be required to kill whomever the master says kill.*

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (*therefore*) you shall not commit adultery, *you will not be compelled to act like breeding-stock, producing more slaves for the master. Instead you will be free to marry and raise families.*

This way of looking at the Ten Commandments liberates us from the danger of seeing them only as either a way to keep our sinful natures in line or to bring us to our knees so that we will accept our need for the Crucified Christ. This way of seeing and hearing turns what appears to be merely law into good news for us and for our lives, and frees us from the slavery of the modern age – that which says it's not cool to have faith, that possessions and things define us - and learn that maybe there actually is a moral compass and a source of eternal love.

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (*therefore*) you shall have no other gods before me. *You do not have to bow down before the false gods of this age – materialism, popularity, power and money - you are free to worship the Lord your God in penitence and faith.*

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (*therefore*) you shall not murder, *you shall not be required to hate who others say to hate – those different to you, or less fortunate than you, or the scapegoat. You are free to love your neighbour, known and unknown, as yourself.*

We've said before how through Christ God accepts us as we are, purely on the merits of Jesus work alone. But while he loves us just the way we are, and loves us too much to let us stay that way.

The Law is a part of God loving us too much to let us stay the way we are; it is a part of God's efforts to transform us into what God wants, and made us, to be. The Law is Good News, for it reminds us that God is the God who leads us out from our slavery to sin, our slavery to conforming to the world's ideals, and leads us forward into the Promised Land of new life in Christ. So what is God saying to you today? And how can we communicate our faith, in words and actions, in text and in pictures, in a way that those around us can understand. The darkness of these times can make things hard to see – the noise of the modrn world can

drown out the words that people need to hear. But through time spent listening to Jesus, we can spread the truth of his life giving love to every corner of our community. We can paint a picture of the one who loves each one of us so much he was willing to die for us. And we can help alleviate the suffering of all God's children through the way we act, speak, and treat each other. Amen.

Bob funeral Tuesday 11:45am Covid restrictions family only

At the CTST Trustees' Meeting yesterday we agreed that sadly we will not be able to hold the Sunrise Service at the seafront again this year, due to the restrictions on gatherings.