

Last week I mentioned that an antiphon to one of the psalms in Morning Prayer in the Divine Office says: “Jesus went around doing good” – and that this struck me as sentimental and ludicrous. It sounds like he trimmed hedges or got people’s shopping. Suppose you asked someone: “What’s that David Clemens like?” and they said: “Oh, he goes around doing good.” Not someone you’d invite to a party. But Jesus didn’t go around doing good - because he was the living embodiment of divine goodness, of the infinite and unchanging goodness of God. God isn’t good – God *is* goodness. Adjectives can’t be applied to God without limiting him to a particular category. God isn’t loving – he is, above all, love.

Love has to be embodied. However temporarily, we are creatures of flesh and blood and we find it hard to understand or incorporate into our lives that which is fleshless and bloodless. Love is probably the greatest of all human experiences and if it does not take form in flesh and blood, it is not love at all, but some meaningless abstraction. There is no such thing as ‘theoretical love’: ‘Do you love your children?’ – ‘Well, theoretically, very much so...’ That’s never going to work. Which is why Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. How much easier life would be we *could* love other people theoretically! – but it’s impossible. It’s also why Jesus told the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, and why he let the woman with a bad reputation wash his feet with her tears and dry them with her hair, why he turned so

much water into wine and healed the sick. In him love was *embodied*. And this had nothing to do with going around doing good. It's not a matter of doing, it's a matter of *being*. The highest instance of embodiment of course, is the Incarnation: *The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us*.

Today's gospel reading is a case in point. The gospels call these healings 'works' or 'works of power', while St John's gospel calls them 'signs'. The original texts don't use the word 'miracle' and the Latin word *miraculum* is not found in St Jerome's Vulgate translation. The gospels use a mixture of terms together: the Hebrew *mopet* meaning 'wonder', the Greek *teras* meaning 'prodigy' and, combined with *semadi*, 'divine sign'. Jesus himself referred to them as 'works'. In the gospel of John he says to the scribes and Pharisees: "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you stoning me?"

The beggar in the gospel account says movingly to Jesus, 'Lord me see again...' – so clearly he wasn't born blind. The reaction of the crowd is interesting too: at first they tell this noisy nuisance to shut up, but as soon as they realise Jesus is calling him, they say: 'Courage! Get up...' Which is called hedging one's bets. Also, of course, they want to see what Jesus is going to do.

The love that Jesus embodies in this work, this sign, is the love that is given shape and form in the whole of creation. It isn't just humans – thank God – who are mirrors of divine love in which the Creator sees his own reflection.

Writing about the death of her beloved cat, the American Franciscan theologian Ilia Delio says:

“Each living being gives glory to God by its unique, core constitutive being... to be a creature of God is to be brought into relationship in such a way that the divine mystery is expressed in each concrete existence. Soul is the mirror of creaturely relatedness that reflects the vitality of divine love.”

We see this love in action in today’s gospel reading. It should be a great comfort to us in such times as these. It is meant to be.