

I know we're all sick and tired of Brexit by now, but I wonder if any of you saw this? This was last week when Parliament was recalled and Boris Johnson was subjected to extended questioning from Parliament. During that long session - and I found myself watching it live - many complaints were made of the Prime Minister's use of language. It was variously labelled as inciting violence, derogatory and dangerous. Certainly the tone of the debate that day was alarmingly hateful across the dispatch box.

And it raises a big question for us... how should we speak to and treat those with whom we disagree? Or those whom we know are wrong? If you're politically minded how do you treat other Decanians who are on 'the wrong side of the Referendum'? But this is not just to do with politics... this is life...

Our passage speaks of two categories these people might be in. The first - enemies. The sorts of people who're against you. The people who try to pull us down, who can never resist having a dig, who would love to see us fail. And second - people who aren't in our 'family', or we might say 'our tribe' or our 'in crowd.'

Here is a circle. All of us operate with a subconscious circle to navigate our social interactions, with some people 'in' and some 'out'. Now it might be that anyone wearing your House badge is 'in.' Or anyone wearing the right Gloucester Academy, or 1st Team kit - they're 'in'. Or maybe for you the 'in crowd' are those who know what pianissimo means, or the ablative. Or maybe your circle is defined by the others who get invites to the same parties as you. We all have a circle, with people who are in and people who are out. And here Jesus asks us how we are treating those people who're - not

on the inside [we tend to treat them very well] - but how are we treating those people who're on the outside?

And he has a radical suggestion to make: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." In other words, apply the same rule as you would to those inside the circle, to those outside the circle. This is radical.

You see the thing is that many of us run our friendships and relationships on a debit system. We all know how that works - in order to get a fiver out at an ATM, you need to have more than a fiver in your bank account in the first place. And this is how it works...

If you want me to be kind to you, or generous to you, or to do you a favour, or to laugh at your joke, or to invite you to my party, or to acknowledge you in the Common Room, you have to do something for me first. You have to put a deposit in the friendship bank [*] Now, if you've done that I may well do you something in return. But if you haven't done anything for me, you must be mad to think I would do anything for you! Because there's no cash in the bank. Do you see?

But here's the thing... Jesus tells us to go into friendship debt. He says, pay out in love to people who have never paid you in love. Be kind to people who're unkind to you. Be generous to people who would never lend you anything. "I tell you, love your enemies." Love people outside the circle.

And if you've ever been the sort of person who lives life outside other peoples' circles, then let me tell you - this is an amazing to have other people hear. Someone very close to me had this happen to her. She was bullied in school, and not loved well at home. Outside the circle. And then she went on an activity holiday where she was brought into the circle. Loved, befriended and welcomed. Even though she was a total stranger. Those people went into friendship debt with

her. And she was so so struck by that, that she had to discover why - what was driving these people.

And the answer was, this passage and the one who inspired it.

Just before we pray I'm going to give us a moment to reflect on what we've heard this morning.

What are the rules behind your circle?

Think of someone outside that circle

How could you treat them as if they were inside the circle today?

PRAY.

Thank you Lord Jesus Christ that you chose to step outside of the circle of Heaven in order to come down into our world to extend your love for us. Thank you that you went into love debt with us, choosing to love us who had never loved you. Open our eyes to your welcome of even us, that we might learn to welcome others and so join you in your perfection. AMEN.