

SERMON PREACHED AT SJH TRINITY 19 WEEK 27 YEAR B 7 OCTOBER 2018; BAPTISM AT 10 am.

Over the past couple of weeks I've been into de Ferrers School to talk about the Christian understanding of marriage to Religious Education classes of 15 year olds. In each class I did a pretend ceremony with two of the students as bride and groom. It was usually difficult to get volunteers, but in one class a boy and a girl were enthusiastic about it. I asked the teacher afterwards if they were an 'item'. She said she wasn't aware of it, but was intrigued and would make enquiries. When I went into school a week later she told me they had announced to their friends that they'd got divorced.

At each wedding, following the Church's order of service, I read the words 'Marriage is a gift of God in creation.' This statement is based on what we've just read from the book of Genesis. The original creation was good: everything was in the right relationship with everything else. The LORD God wanted the man to have a partner. Being alone was not right. So the LORD God made the woman. The rightness of other relationships is implied in this passage. The man gives names to every living creature. Naming is a divine activity: in the opening chapter of Genesis God called the dry land Earth, the waters Sea, the light Day and the darkness Night. So humanity shares in this activity of God. Naming the animals implies that the man is the highest being God has created, and has a responsibility of care towards them, as a few of us discussed at the study group on Thursday. Only into the man did the LORD God breathe the breath of life. He put the man in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. So the picture is of God, man, woman, plants and animals in their right relationships with each other.

But we know things have gone wrong. An example of this is provided in the gospel reading when the Pharisees test Jesus by asking him a question about divorce: the breaking of a relationship. In the dialogue that follows, Jesus doesn't disregard the place of the law given through Moses, but treats divorce as a concession because of the hardness of people's hearts. It was not part of the original plan in creation.

Hearts are still hard. Jesus' words about divorce and remarriage are a counsel of perfection. They look back to creation. They also look forward: to the kingdom of God which Jesus is bringing. In this kingdom right relationships will be restored. Jesus' first disciples have a lot to learn, and so do we. They try to stop children being brought to Jesus – an example of the fracturing of relationships, the misuse of authority. But children are models of discipleship. It's not that they are without sin:

there can be pride, anger, greed and so on in the nursery! Rather, children accept things as gifts without imagining they can earn them by what they do. And children naturally trust others. What tragedy when that trust is abused!

Today Helen and Nicholas are bringing Mia to be baptised. The words 'Let the children come to me; do not stop them' are chiselled into the font. It is a joyful occasion as Mia participates in this re-enactment of Jesus' death and resurrection, even though she has no choice in the matter. These are the events through which Jesus has restored the goodness of the original creation. The right relationship between humanity and God has been restored. Our sins are forgiven; we are filled with God's life, we are united with Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit. Mia is being received into the church, which on earth is far from perfect, but she joins all its members as, together, we try to make the kingdom of God a reality in our life in this world.