

Sermon for St Barnabas day.

So, it's a funny old world at the moment. I was going to try and write this sermon without mentioning the Coronavirus word ... but I've failed. So how do I tie up St Barnabas, who gave Mark a second chance, with Covid-19? Perhaps I was thinking of all those friends and family who I haven't had the time to talk to for years, or who I'm still sulking with because of some slight in the past. Of course I don't intend to stay away from them forever, there's will always be time in the future. Or maybe now is the time to build those bridges?

At the moment we've all got more time on our hands than we can handle and the television is repeating repeats ad infinitum which of course is helping us sleep. The problem with repeat television programming is that we look forward to seeing something that we enjoyed years ago; and when it appears we can't understand why we ever took the time to watch it. You see we've changed and our perceptions from years ago have evolved. Of course the Carry on Movies will never lose their magic, but to be brutally honest the shoulder pads in Dallas are becoming more than a little dated. You see we can all change.

We're all using social media far more now than before to try and keep tabs on our families and friends. No more letters and no more sitting on the telephone seat in the hall and dialling numbers. We're evolving and we're changing to the situation around us. You see we can all change.

When we watch the news we find that people are finding the strangest and weirdest things to do whilst they await release from lockdown such as playing football with a toilet roll or feeding horses in the living room like Arnold S; and unless we share our household with somebody armed with scissors and a comb, we're all having the bad hair day to end all bad hair days. Things are very different.

But, think back a few months when we all used to stand around and talk - to just chat. And the more we talked we learnt so much about each other and our different backgrounds and lifestyles and we shared our lives.

During these friendly chats one of the things that always stood out for me was the number of people who were estranged from one or more of their family members or close friends. The number of times that people would say "Oh yes I've got a sister but we haven't spoken for years", or "Yes, we used to go out with him and his wife, but we don't bother anymore" was quite alarming. What was also obvious was that at some time "the estranged" may have been close, may have been loved and there were special memories associated with them.

Very often people couldn't even remember why they had drifted apart or argued. It's very poignant that people were missing out on the company of their once loved, but now distant friends and family. No doubt many thought that there was plenty of time tomorrow and that the issues dividing them could be sorted at a later date; and many people remembered an upsetting event caused by their ex-friend and would quote the old saying "A leopard never changes its spots".

But now, we're a few months into the pandemic and everything has changed. We don't stand together to chat anymore, and the speed and devastating effects of this virus have torn the fabric of our old everyday lives completely apart. As the numbers of deaths has racked up worldwide we're all reminded constantly when we watch the news of our own mortality. Perhaps time is finite?

But it's not all doom and gloom. God is everlasting and will always be there. What did Jesus say in our gospel from John "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." And there is real joy in loving one another and enjoying friendship.

Perhaps now is the time when we have all had our realities shaken up to follow up this command?

But why today? St Barnabas's day. I bet you wondered when I was going to get round to St Barnabas. But Barnabas did something amazing that is a lesson to all of us.

He had been working with Paul for a long time when he, Paul and John Mark went to Cyprus to spread the word of Christ. Unfortunately, Mark didn't complete the journey and returned home.

Later when Paul asked him to accompany him again Barnabas insisted on taking Mark. Paul didn't trust Mark to finish the journey and refused saying that Mark was unreliable. I'm afraid that this led to Paul and Barnabas parting ways.

Barnabas on the other hand gave Mark the benefit of the doubt, he realised that people change and he placed his trust in Mark by taking him to Cyprus. Mark did not let him down.

So maybe for all those people estranged or distant from the loved families and friends it may be worth taking a look at Barnabas and taking on board the words from our Lord Jesus Christ. "Love each other as I have loved you".

Jesus was the ultimate giver of second chances. Tax collectors, Roman soldiers to name but a few -and they became some of the greatest apostles. St Barnabas gave Mark a second chance.

So in this new "normality" perhaps it may be a time to give our estranged friends and family that second chance. If we love each other as Christ loved us that second chance may bring back the closeness, the love and the happy times that have been lost in the mist of time.

Thank you St Barnabas for showing us the way.