# Sermon by Canon Sonia Gyles

Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin

Sunday 15 March 2020

# Driving in my car on Monday last a song came on the radio which I hadn’t heard in a long time. It was a song by the American music group Black Eyed Peas entitled ‘Where is the love?’ Let me read you some of the lyrics:

*“Whatever happened to the values of humanity, Whatever happened to the fairness in equality, Instead of spreading love we spread animosity, Lack of understanding, leading lives away from unity. Father help us, send us some guidance from above, cause people got me questioning, where is the love?”*

Whatever happened to the values of humanity? Where is the love?

It was rather ironic that this song was played as I was driving back from the supermarket in which I had pretty much witnessed two women arguing over the last tray of tinned tomatoes.

We are currently living in very strange, uncertain and confusing times, and the pandemic that is Covid-19 seems to have brought out both the best and the worst in people.

Without doubt, we see the best in those in the medical and caring professions in hospitals, nursing homes, and out in the community, continuing to care for those who are sick and vulnerable and most at risk, despite the risk to themselves. We see charities continuing to help those who are homeless and those who are elderly and alone, despite the potential risk to themselves. We see shops offering to deliver to the elderly and housebound, and hotels and cafes prepared to deliver meals. We see people looking out for elderly neighbours. In my role as Rector of a parish, as I along with many of my clergy colleagues, grapple with decisions that we find ourselves having to make, I have been greatly encouraged by messages of care and support from parishioners, both for me and my husband, and for fellow parishioners.

However, we have and continue to observe first hand people looking out only for themselves. People bulk buying in the shops without, it would seem, a single thought of the consequences of their actions. What about those who can’t afford to bulk buy, who only have enough money each week to get what they need for that week. What about older people without any form of transport who only get to the shop once a week and can only buy what they are able to carry. What about those who genuinely need to isolate themselves due to underlying health conditions and therefore need to stock up on provisions. Where is the love?

Then you’ve people stealing face masks and hand sanitiser from hospitals which result in reducing the stocks available to those who actually need them. Where is the love?

The reason for this panicked behaviour is, no doubt, fear – as David McWilliams puts it “mass greed turned into mass fear”, along with an uncertainty about how long this crisis might last, and that is understandable. And yet it has reminded us of that which always seems to be just under the surface – our tendency towards selfishness and self-centredness, and with that our inability to be community. In the midst of panic, we seem to be losing sight of the value of others and of the importance of caring for one another, not least those who are most vulnerable and who are left feeling less important, less worthy or, indeed, forgotten altogether. We seem to be losing something of our humanity.

How at odds we are, then, with the message in our Gospel reading wherein we see humanity at its best. Of course, the scenario is very different but the message is still the same.

We read of Jesus engaging with a woman at a well. At a first glance, this doesn’t seem like such a big deal, but it was a big deal, it was a very big deal. As a woman, and a Samaritan woman, and a Samaritan woman with a rather questionable past, this person was on the edge of society, marginalised, unseen, uncared for. She comes to the well with, it would seem a thirst - a thirst to be seen, to be heard, to be acknowledged, to be accepted, to be loved.

And Jesus responds to her thirst. Completely ignoring the fact that in engaging with her, he - a male Jew - would have been considered a traitor to the Jewish religious tradition, he responds to her with the living water of recognition, acceptance and love. He satisfies her thirst. Where is the love? There is the love. Right there in Christ who by satisfying her thirst, exemplifies humanity at its best.

Of course, we are offered this same water to quench our thirst to be seen and accepted and loved. If we chose to accept it we can rightly feel grateful that God comes to us with the offer of refreshment and life. But to stop there is to leave the extraordinary message of this passage incomplete, and to allow the Gospel to support what can become little more than selfishness. The call to us is to move from being only recipients of living water to givers of it.

In every community there are those who are thirsty - the vulnerable, the frightened, the anxious, those who thirst to be seen and heard and cared for; those who thirst to be embraced and supported; those who thirst for connectedness; those who thirst to be loved.

During these weeks, maybe months, we have an incredible opportunity to show love for one another. Love, not as doctrine or feeling, but as an attitude from which we operate, a love that shatters greed and fear and selfishness. We will get through this, and when we do and when we look back on these times, may we, or those who come after us, never have to ask the question “where was the love?

*Sonia Gyles*

*15/03/2020*