

How should I be thinking about my relationships?

Regularly and deeply! What I've been saying this morning is that God actually is *relationships* - the Trinity, in which the three persons relate perfectly reciprocally, and can be perfectly known only by each other. For us to enter into relationship with God is to be swept up into this divine community. This transforms our *earthly* relationships, which are sometimes glorious, but often pretty sad: we know that we've been brought into being by this God who is total love, total relationship; God wants to share his life with us, and therefore we can hope to be like God at last.

The most powerful way we have of discovering God is the coming of Jesus. He loved people with this divine love, and the result was overwhelming. Although the people in his stories are all imperfect like us, weak in understanding and poor at welcoming him, their lives were still transformed, and they got a glimpse of God as close to them, which made them ready to change and grow in ways they wouldn't previously have thought possible.

This is real relationship - at least on the side of God, if not on ours. Therefore it must come to us primarily as a gift from God, who has it to offer us. But *being loved by God* is real, and it is an experience which brings perfection into our lives. This is the way we should be thinking about our other relationships too. We aren't perfect, and this means that by themselves our relationships can't be either. In fact, if we look for infinite value and perfect love from other people, we'll be exceedingly disappointed. This is the demand that breaks so many marriages, and it is a source of the commonest form of misery, of tremendous cynicism and low expectation, and of sheer evil. Half the lives of English people are darkened by divorce because of it. We don't know how many others don't actually part, but live lives of disappointment, or "quiet desperation" nonetheless.

Here are some questions to ponder.

- 1 Is God real enough for me to learn from in this way? In what sense do I let God teach me love? Am I praying enough for God to *matter*, or am I totally immersed in work and other friendships? How central is my trust in God?
- 2 How are my other relationships changing and growing? Are there people I no longer look to for genuine friendship, or love? Am I alive to the people who need me and want me to care for them? Or am I running ragged through lack of support?
- 3 How about the language of glory overleaf? The Letter to the Ephesians knows where it is going, and is powerfully conscious of "the mystery of God's plan". How do I think of that idea, in a culture where everyone lives in a "self-made" world?
- 4 What does the commandment mean, "Love one another as I have loved you"? What precisely is it asking of me? Has anybody loved me this way? How did I know? Do I love anybody this way?
- 5 Am I coming to know that, in relationship, I am on the brink of a huge mystery?

The Christological Hymn in the Letter to the Ephesians

Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ.

He chose us in Christ before the world was made
to be holy and faultless, and to live through love in his presence,
marking us out for himself beforehand,
to be adopted children through Jesus Christ.

Such was his purpose and good pleasure,
to the praise of his glorious grace,
his free gift to us in the Beloved:
in whom, through whose blood, we gain our freedom,
the forgiveness of our sins.

Such is the richness of the grace
which he has showered on us in all wisdom and insight.
He has let us know the mystery of his purpose,
according to his good pleasure,
which he determined beforehand in Christ,
for him to act upon when the ages had run their course:
that he would bring everything together under Christ, as Head:
everything in the heavens, and everything on earth.
And it is in him that we have received our inheritance,
marked out beforehand as we were,
under the plan of the One
who guides all things as he decides by his own will:
chosen to be, for the praise of his glory,
the people who would put their hopes in Christ before he came.

Now you too, in Christ, have heard the message of the truth,
and the Gospel of your salvation,
and, having put your trust in it,
you have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit of the Promise,
who is the pledge of our inheritance,
for the freedom of the people whom God has taken for his own,
to make his glory praised.