

Jesus Said series. John 15:18-25. We are Hated. 1.8.2021

When you were a child you probably played ball games with your friends? You might remember where the person whose ball you are all playing with decides that things aren't going their way so they pick it up and take it home. with them. That moment when someone decides that, because they aren't getting their way, nobody will be able to play.

It's been a long time since that literally happened to me. However, something similar seems to happen within the Church whenever mention of the increasing secularisation of our society arises. You hear phrases like, "Society hates us." "We are marginalised and persecuted."

Firstly, we are not a marginalised, persecuted minority fighting against some sort of Godless establishment.

We live in a country with freedom of worship. Freedom to share our faith. Church leaders sit in the upper chamber of our Parliament.

Secondly, yes – there are people who hate us. There are people who want Christianity consigned to the history books. There are those who think it has no place in our society. But, Jesus said that this would happen. It shouldn't come as a surprise.

What should come as a surprise is how some Christians and parts of the Church react. Jesus talked about the hatred and persecution his followers could expect to encounter. He doesn't tell us is that we should throw our toys out of the pram when we come up against any resistance or opposition. He doesn't tell us that we should insist on retaining a privileged position in society. He doesn't tell us that we should try to impose His teachings on everybody else and that we should cry about being persecuted when everybody else won't accept that.

To an extent there is some truth. Christians who follow Jesus as opposed to those who simply identify as Christian because they are British are in a minority. There is greed, hatred and prejudice woven into the fabric of our society, and we should absolutely take a stand against it.

However, the thing we may be getting wrong isn't whether or not to make a stand, but how we make those stands and what issues we choose to stand against.

For example, there is a lot of publicity generated about Christians who are disciplined at work, or even fired, for either sharing their faith or for refusing to carry out basic responsibilities of their job because it goes against their personal beliefs. Christian media, Church leaders and various newspapers pile in, all shouting about the erosion of faith in this country. Very often, though, when we look at the cases we find that there is an awful lot more to these cases than headlines and sound-bites. A teacher was sacked, apparently, just for sharing her faith. However in reality, the teacher involved had told pupils they were going to Hell for not being Christians, made derogatory comments about pupils' dress and consistently preached at classes despite being an English teacher, not an RE one.

If we worry that we are ridiculed by society, maybe we are making a rod for our own back. We are called by to live in truth. When we simply react to half heard stories or one-sided headlines, when we complain because society isn't exactly how we want it to be, we remove ourselves from truth and, rather than living in Christ, we live in a world of our own making and with our own values.

Yes we can comment that the world isn't how we want it to be but simply stamping our feet and saying that the BBC and newspapers hate us is just counter-productive.

So, if this isn't the way to go, then what is. In verse 21 He said,

"But they will do all this to you because you are mine; for they do not know the one who has sent me."

If the world truly does hate us, then Jesus was clear that it is because they don't know God. This is not a reason for us to throw our hands up in horror and complain but it's an invitation to show the love of God to it. Not to brow beat people with religious talk. Not to try to force everyone into following our interpretation of God's Law. But to speak and demonstrate God's love for all in every interaction we have.

That is why we need to learn how to share our faith in an effective way. Not in a way that involves

preaching at people. Instead, we need to be able to share our faith by our actions, never being afraid to let people know whose name we act in, and never being afraid to talk about Him when the time is right. But always, always in a way which gives Him glory and shows love to others rather than condemnation.

By all means put your point of view. Some people will not want to know. But that has always and will always be the case and, while we should never give up, we should learn to accept that opposition to Jesus and Christians will always exist.

Some people will start to listen. But this can only happen if we stop focusing on how the world makes us feel and start focusing more what Jesus told us to do.

Jesus didn't go out into the world and complain that the Jewish leaders were trying to kill him, or that he wasn't being listened to by everyone, or that his followers were being marginalised, or that he was chased out of some towns. No, he found people in every situation he could find; people in authority, people with no authority, the educated and the uneducated, the tax collector, adulteress, widow, fisherman, soldier, rabbi and all other walks of life. He found people where they were and he showed them love, accepted them, and left it for them to respond as they wished.

This is how he calls us to be as well. Not to throw our toys out of the pram when the world won't conform to our standards, but to love others and demonstrate the hope that comes from following Jesus.