

I am an early riser. Early Saturday morning, I was browsing the early morning news when on the BBC website, under the section, "10 things we didn't know last week" or something similar, I came across a headline which read: **People Who Order Coffee Black Are More Likely To Be Psychopaths!**¹ I ran into the bathroom to look at myself in the mirror, and was strangely at peace that my eyes had not moved closer to the bridge of my nose, and my eyebrows still had that gentle downward slope and did not rise to a pointy peak just before they turned ever so slightly towards my temple.

I ambled back to my study and opened the dictionary. My mind was so confused and discombobulated, I found myself searching for the word **psychopath** under the letter "s". Anyway, when I found it, this is what it read, **"a psychopath is a person suffering from chronic mental disorder with abnormal or violent social behaviour; an unstable and aggressive person:** (as an example, went on to say) **schoolyard psychopaths** (I did not know psychopaths are to be found in schoolyards!) **will gather around a fight to encourage the combatants."**

By this time I was a proper emotional mess, and decided I needed a cup of coffee. As I ground the beans for a cup of fresh black coffee... the thought struck me, *what am I doing?* Is this proof that I am a psychopath?

I tried to calm myself with the thought that it's only a news reporter trying to frighten the weekend reader, and tried to distract myself by thinking of the Sunday service, of Jill whom I would meet for the first time, what she will be telling us about students and their lives, and then it struck me: my opening line would be, "Things are not always what they seem to be (what we are told they are!)" BUT, what if someone comes to me after the service and says, "O Kalyan! I saw you ..."

¹ "10 things we did not know last week" BBC Website on 17 October, 2015. Article linked to Huffington Post website dated 13 October, 2015 by Kate Bratskeir, Food and Health Editor.

So, I told the voice in my head, "O Shut it", then realised that I was getting angry at a voice in my head, and realised I was, for all intents and purposes, exhibiting the behaviour of a psychopath - voice in my head telling me what to do and I am angrily talking back to it!

Anyway, I came here later in the morning for my weekly dose of black coffee and cake, and somehow, I felt strangely at peace.

Our section of text this morning on the continuing theme of The Good shepherd, is Matthew 18, and as I read and re-read it, I was increasingly convinced, "Things are not always what they seem to be".

Last Friday was World Student Day and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students plays an important role to highlight the work of Christ among students, as we have just heard from Jill.

As a community to the west of Oxford, we are faced with a serious onslaught of negative press about students; I find it fascinating that the timing of Jill's visit and our continuing study of the Good Shepherd in Matthew 18, fit in so well. We shall look at this narrative in detail next Sunday, but today, I want us to understand the framework and background of this passage.

The first thing I would like you to note is the setting: Jesus is the teacher and He has a class of twelve students. Having been told to stop fishing for fish, and to follow Jesus who would teach them to "fish for men", these Twelve ARE students whose Teacher, Jesus, is teaching them about the kingdom of God.

Like all students, especially small children, they want the Teacher's attention and approval.

Matthew's chapter 18 opens with the disciples asking the question, **"Master, Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"**

Note, they did not ask Jesus "... who **WILL BE** the greatest...?", they asked, "... who **IS** the greatest...?" There is no doubt that the greatest in the Kingdom of God is God Himself, but this seemed to have been lost on the Twelve, and they were behaving like children.

Their question is no different than a small child asking, "**Teacher (Miss), in this classroom, today, now, who IS your favourite student?**", and the child asking the question, is expecting to be told by the teacher, "**You are, my darling child!**"

Jesus' response to the question posed by one of the Twelve, is to treat them exactly as they behave: as little children. And to make this point as clearly as possible, Matthew tells us, "**Jesus called to Himself a little child, made Him stand in a small clearing while they stood around him (imagine the effort to convince the child to leave his/her parents and stand there by him/herself!) and said to them, 'Unless you change your attitude and become like this child, you will never enter the Kingdom of God'.**"

Jesus the Teacher is very clear in His message to the 12 students standing before Him, **Let me use this little child to teach you a lesson - you are grown adults behaving like this little child; if you want to behave like a child, then first become a child and learn childlike trust and simple faith; learn to make yourself vulnerable like this little one standing here surrounded by towering giants like you, and admit you cannot advance your life without the help, direction or resources of a parent or a teacher; ONLY THEN, PERHAPS ONLY THEN, will you stand a chance to get into the Kingdom of Heaven.**

While the student-teacher relationship is both, important and significant, it is not a one-way relationship: it is not just about the student doing what the teacher tells them to do. The student-teacher relationship is a two-way relationship, and Jesus does not waste time to make this point.

First, you need to become trusting as this little child, but I caution all you who are Teachers. Receive these children and teach them, as I do; but if any Teacher does not, and through his or her wilful, neglectful unintentional actions and words, a child wanders off, and as a result, their relationship with me is broken, (Jesus then uses a hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point), it would be better for that Teacher to have millstone tied to their neck and be drowned, not in a puddle, or a river, or the sea, but in the DEEPEST part of the ocean! Remember, Jesus is using hyperbole/exaggeration, to make a point, so please don't think that in the middle of the Atlantic or Pacific ocean, there is heap of teachers dead bodies with millstones tied around their necks!

Hebrew society is very helpful in teaching us this two-way, student-teacher relationship.

At the age of 13 a Hebrew boy goes through an initiation ceremony called the *Bar-Mitzvah* (*Bat-Mitzvah* for girls turning 12-plus-one-day).

From the day of the boy's 13th and the girl's 12th birthday, society no longer considers them little children; they are considered to be people learning to be adults, learning to be responsible to live by God's commandments, God's laws. At the age of 12/13, a young person is told, it is a privilege given by God, to be a responsible adult in His world.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony, however, is not **ALL** about the young person making promises; all the adults present (parents and members of the extended family and community invited to the event) also promise to teach the "**apprentice adult**", how to live as a God honouring adult.

As a final thought, let me leave you with this to ponder:

The babies of today are the children of tomorrow;

The children of today are the youth of tomorrow;

The youth of today are the students of tomorrow;
The students of today will run the world tomorrow;
Those who run the world today, will take care of us tomorrow;
Those who take care of us today, will need the babies of today, to
take care of them tomorrow!

Each generation is tied in with the next; one generation cannot live without the other. Students today are the responsible adults of tomorrow, and every responsible adult today is trusted to teach the students of today, how to live that life which God has called them to.

If you will believe that **not** everyone who orders their coffee black is a psychopath, then believe, "Things are not always what they seem to be".

If you will believe in the testimony of students Jill opened our eyes to this morning, believe also in the Word of God, that His eternal Word is true, and it changes the lives of students as they journey towards adulthood and become responsible and Godly citizens in this World.

AMEN