

Complex relationships - Mark 8-31-38;

The Bible is full of stories. The stories are full of relationships.

For our reflection today I have chosen the lectionary passages given to us for second Sunday in Lent.

I have titled it as "Complex relationships".

Relationships starts at birth. As a midwife I have been present at several deliveries when babies are born. The first relationship of a mum and baby and the bond is so unique. I myself gave birth to two children and now I have grandchildren too. Each relationship is different and very special in deed. The relationship between a husband and wife; relationship with a friend; relationship with a teacher. They are all different.

We have all experienced relationships in one form or other. I am sure some relationships seems very strange and complex. Relationships may develop, change or matures or become strained at different stages of our lives.

God created Adam and Eve and created us all in his own image and wanted to have a relationship with us.

Throughout the Bible we see 'complex relationships' Starting from Adam and Eve who broke the relationship with God. Cain and Abel had love hate relationship, which led Cain killing his brother Abel due to jealousy

We know the story of Noah and God's covenant relationship with him..

In the book of Genesis we read, God made a covenant relationship with Abram saying "I will give you many descendants as the stars in the sky" (Gen15:5). Even though Abram had a son called Ishmael for an Egyptian slave girl called Hager, God wanted to keep his covenant and bless Abram and his wife Sarai as they did not have any children.

13 years later, God called Abram and made a second covenant saying "I will bless you with many descendants; you will be an ancestor of many nations. Your name will no longer Abram, but Abraham; Sarai will be called Sarah. (Gen 17).

Abraham and Sarah were blessed with a son Isaac at a very ripe old age as promised by God.

Abraham had an ongoing relationship with God. Even when God asked, Isaac to be sacrificed, Abraham obeyed God. Here we see his obedient and faithful relationship with God. Rescued by God on the mountain in Moriah, Isaac was the source of blessing for all nations. God's 'Everlasting covenant' relationship was with Isaac.

Throughout the Old Testament we read stories like Joseph and his brothers, who misjudged Joseph, but Joseph showed forgiveness and kindness.

In the story of Ruth and Naomi, we see a special relationship of compassion and commitment. The story of Job showed intimate relationship.

There are so many other stories with complex relationships too.

The Psalmist gives several different aspects of relationships too. We have seen all kinds. We have also seen the psalmist wrestling with his feelings and adrift from God, yearning for divine comfort. In many ways, it is an appeal for a renewal of relationship for an intimacy that one can only imagine.

New Testament is full of stories too. They enlighten all sorts of relationship to us.

Remember the woman who poured the most expensive perfume on to Jesus feet where her selfless relationship was displayed. She emptied the best she had to show her love and commitment to Jesus.

The relationship of the friends who carried their friend on his bed. Went through the trouble to get to Jesus even through the roof. They had so much compassion for their friend.

Today's gospel passage is all about the complex relationship of Jesus, Peter, the disciples and us.

Jesus has performed so many miracles during his three and a half years of ministry. Now he begins to predict about his death.

After healing the blind man at Bethsaida, Jesus and his disciples went away to the village near Caesarea Philippi. On the way, casually Jesus asked the disciples, 'who do people say I am?' They answered, some say you are John the Baptist, some say you're Elijah and others say you are a prophet. But Jesus asked the disciples, 'who do you say I am?' Peter answered; 'you are the Messiah, the Son of Man, The Anointed one'. He said this as he was aware as the prophets spoke, that the Messiah would come, who would restore God's people. Peter was right. But that was all he knew.

Jesus wanted to prepare his disciples for the inevitable. He started teaching them saying 'The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law'; That he would be put to death and will rise after three days.

This is not what they wanted to hear. They did not sign up to follow a Jesus who would say that he will die soon. I am sure they didn't leave their families, friends, and livelihood to come and hear this unexpected, irrelevant message.

As usual, Peter jumped the gun.

So Peter took Jesus to a side and rebuked him. 'How dare you say such things?'

Peter must have thought, in his subconscious mind, 'you are the Messiah, the king, the Son of Man who has come to rescue the people from the Roman Empire. So why? Why are you saying such things? I don't like the whole suffering and dying. I want you to be around us all'. Peter must have been very hurt, angry and sad when he heard Jesus say about his suffering and death.

If you were Peter, wouldn't you be? After witnessing the demons being cast out, healing the sick, preventing death, feeding the multitudes; Surely Peter was over whelmed with what he heard. Peter showed his possessive relationship as a close friend and also his intimate relationship with Jesus.

But Jesus looked around and in front of all the disciples rebuked Peter. "Get away from me Satan", he said. "Your thoughts don't come from God, you're speaking like a demon possessed man!" Jesus had the authority to rebuke Peter in the presence of everyone. The relationship he had with his disciples were genuine and transparent.

Jesus wanted to prepare not only the disciples but the crowd who followed him too. He had an open and honest relationship with everyone. That's why he said if you want to follow me, you need to take up the cross and follow me. He wanted them to know, following him means they too will be persecuted, harassed and the path they take without him too will be very rocky.

Just imagine how they must have felt. Devastated I am sure.

The disciples and the crowd have witnessed so many of Jesus's miracles and listen to his teaching and followed him from one side of the lake to the other, without food, without sleep to be told following Jesus is not easy, it has painful consequences.

Are you feeling like the disciples and the crowd? When you started coming to church, when you baptised your child, when you committed to be a church steward or lead worship?

Are you thinking twice? DON'T.

God made a covenant relationship with you and me; that he would be with us, whatever happens. The cross of loneliness, physical and mental sickness, job losses, financial pressures, abuse, violence, uncertainties even this pandemic, whatever it may be, God is with us.

Immanuel -God with us. This is the promise we have.

Sometimes we may feel we are ok, but when we look around and see violence, rejection, injustice, abuse, homelessness, and relationship breakdowns. We are called to pray and help in whatever way possible. Speak for the voiceless, the vulnerable and point them to the right source.

However much we may long for a close relationship with God and however much we try to live that out in our lives, the whole thing is far from simple.

But one thing we know is that, Jesus has made it possible for us.

Jesus has demonstrated his selfless, ongoing, genuine and intimate relationships.

By sharing God's story and different stories from the scriptures, we share the gospel and serve others in the name of Jesus and become living testimonies. Every good deed, kind smile, gentle word of encouragement and heartfelt prayer, produces a beaming reminder of God's faithfulness and his unconditional and life-transforming love.

Dear friends as Jesus prepared his disciples for his death on the cross; let us remember that he died for us. So during this lent let us spend a few moments, to find God through others and scriptures even in complex relationships. Let us look around us and reflect on our relationships. Let us mend our broken and strained relationships with others. Let us renew our relationship with God;

God bless us and enrich us in all relationships. AMEN.

