

Introduction

- What do people feel as they come into this church?
 - I'm not particularly thinking about people who are here every week
 - nor am I really thinking about visitors who are used to church - perhaps because they go to church elsewhere
- Rather I'm thinking about outsiders, not churchy people, people who are not Christians
 - during our time in Motherwell we came across someone who had had some church contact as a child, but had really left that behind during school days
 - she'd been seeing someone, and ended up pregnant, had the baby
 - but now she felt **guilty!**
 - there was a bit of her that wanted to have the wee one baptised, and another bit that felt she couldn't - because everyone in church would be condemning her, looking on with disapproval
- But there are also many people who have a quite different reaction:
 - **TLUG porn collection story!**
 - he'd never come across any meaningful conception of this being wrong, and as a consequence he was **careless of his actions**
- **Guilt** or **carelessness!**

But everyone is doing it!

- The reason those reactions come up is that there is a gulf between God's people and the world
 - between what we believe to be right and other people believe to be right
 - between what we do and what other people do
- Area of sexual sin is but one, very stark, example
 - at risk of perpetuating the myth that Christians only ever think of sin in terms of sexual sin, I'll illustrate this...
 - much of the **world around us** says that living in a homosexual relationship is acceptable; perhaps still something uncomfortable for many people, but not considered wrong
 - Scripture says (Romans 1:27) **In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due**
 - much of the **world around us** says that living in a sexual relationship with someone outside of marriage is fine - perhaps as long as both partners consent, or as long as you are careful (mostly for each other's sexual health)... for example, 41% of births in Scotland in 1999 were registered to unmarried parents
 - Scripture says (Exodus 20:14, and affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19, in John 8:11, etc) **"You shall not commit adultery."**
 - much of the **world around us** says that porn is OK, that lust is acceptable - boom in internet pornography, ever more explicit and titillating TV... sex sells!
 - Scripture says (Matthew 5:28) **I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**
- There is a huge gulf - a gulf that sometimes results in **guilt**, other times in **carelessness**
 - how **should** we as Christians respond to people around us who are blatantly sinning?

Response 1: Judgement

- One response that Christians often make is to **judge**
 - at its most extreme to come right out and condemn people to their faces
 - and occasionally that becomes little more than name calling!
 - probably we shy away from that - we value tolerance, after all...

Matthew 7:1-6 That's tricky: they're sinners! Fintry, 12/6/2005, am

- but often Christians manage to communicate judgement even when don't actually say so!
- and this is dreadfully insidious
- it was this that happened in that story from Motherwell; no one actually said anything about the child born outside of marriage... it was what they didn't say, or how they said what they did say, that communicated "you aren't one of us; you aren't like us; you are less good than us; you are less acceptable than we are"
- And Jesus in the passage from Matthew we read earlier said don't act like that!
 - for we are sinners!
 - we need forgiveness just as much...
- Need to go **out of our way** to avoid being condemning!

Response 2: Compromise

- Reacting against that judgementalism, I think most Christians today have ended up **never actually speaking up**; we accept everything
 - we are so concerned not to judge, not to break relationship, that we say nothing...
 - I'd have to put my hand up here...
 - whether I did the right thing or not in the TLUG porn example I gave earlier, I'm not sure - I didn't know people then as well as I do now - **but I certainly didn't say anything!**
- But we do we need to speak up:
 - its not merely issue of "truth", of being right
 - **its a matter of salvation**
 - *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Romans 10:14)*
 - one part of coming to faith is to come to appreciate our own sinfulness;
 - how will our world comprehend its sinfulness if we will not tell?

Response 3: Compassionate Integrity

- So, if we reject judgementalism and reject compromise, what are we left with?
 - and what does that look like in actual practise?
- Let me suggest what I'll call **compassionate integrity**
 - Cf Jesus in John 8, the woman caught in adultery
 - read and explain...
- I think two very useful observations about how Jesus acted in such situations:
 - **first**, he often used questions to bring truth with compassion into situations
 - in John 8 - "If any one of you is without sin..." or to the woman "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"
 - **second**, he communicated his concern for the person **before** his concern over their behaviour
 - in John 4, the exchange about the water, living or otherwise, is revolving round the thirst in her life for real refreshment; Jesus wants her spiritual thirst to be slaked, not merely her sin exposed

Conclusion

- This is the reality of our broken world
 - if we are to take up the challenge of loving it...
 - *through a halls redevelopment, or community family days, or through developing partnerships with other agencies working in the area, or whatever else*
 - we will end up with people, people whose lives do not already match Christian standards - 'cos they are not Christians!!
 - we will have to **shun compromise**, shun judgement, and rather **grow in compassionate integrity**

