

## Bully-Free Week

## Rev. Ben Arcus

It's bully-free week this week, and I feel a little bit stuck about what to say about it.

On one hand, I can say that bullying is not as bad as it used to be when I was at school. I have told the stories a few times here in chapel about how I was regularly given dead legs by a much older boy when I was at college. I have also a few times told the story of a boy called Michael who was severely bullied by everyone at school – even by the younger kids. He was a kid who was born with very little that would make him 'cool' and that even none of this was his fault, he had to put up with an awful existence, from other kids who through nothing they had done, were given a lot more.

This unfairness of life had a big impact on me back then, and I became very depressed, wondering what the point of life was when it all seemed so wrong.

It was during this time that I by chance picked up a bible and read the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 that we heard in the reading today. Jesus said the things that deep down in my heart I wanted to believe about the world. That Michael would somehow be comforted for all that he had been through, that there would be a putting right of all the wrong that had been done to him; that those who did what was wrong wouldn't always win out and get away with it.

It was this that lead me to the path I am on today – of wanting to help, of wanting to be part of the putting right, of making this world the way I feel it is supposed to be.

And while things are maybe not as bad as they used to be (and to be honest I don't know what it's like to be a teenager today), bullying still goes on everyday.

Mostly what I see is the teasing, the name-calling, the hassling and the threatening of others. It usually comes from the bigger boys, who by the luck of the draw just happen to be bigger than others, and they use this lucky break they have got to try and lift themselves up by putting others down. And I'll be honest guys – it still really gets to me. I still feel angry and sad about bullying. And I feel discouraged at times because I feel as if, despite everything we say and do about it, it still goes on.

I guess there are three basic contributions that we make to this world. Bullying is an example of the first type – taking, making things worse, being selfish, turning this world into hell for other people. The second type is to stand back and say I am just responsible for me. What happens to others is not my problem.

The third response is the kind of response we see in the story of how Pink Shirt Day came about. It's a response that tries to make the world the way we wish it would be, the way deep down we know it should be.

Why would you do that? Why be a person who makes things better rather than does nothing, or makes things worse?

It all comes down to the golden rule. Jesus says we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. And this isn't just a rule to follow - it's actually an explanation of the way that life is.

Whatever we dish out is what we will receive in return. If we dish out hurt or indifference to others, we will get it back from them, even if not directly.

The thing about bullies is that they often are that way because they feel bad about themselves. Otherwise why go out of your way to bring another person down? And one thing I have learned from my time working in schools is that those who have been bullied often become bullies. Once we are in this negative spiral, it can be hard to break out of.

One of the ways we can begin to break a negative spiral in our lives is to start acting in the opposite way. We actually all have the power to radically transform our lives if we are able to take seriously the secret of the golden rule. If we stop repaying hurt with hurt and insult with insult, we can change ourselves and others around us.

One of the most powerful weapons we have against hatred, bullying and negativity is a kind and gentle response.

In Paul's letter to the Romans he writes: "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We may not have the strength to fight bullies, or the power to change their behaviour, or to create a perfect system where this never happens. But Jesus' own answer to the evil in the world is something all of us have the power to use – to love our enemies and do good to those who treat us badly. I think this is the only real power we have to change the negative spirals of hate and anger and the endless rounds of violence and revenge we see in our society. If we are able to have the courage to follow Jesus' example, then I think we can change the world.