

There's a lot of talk at the moment on social media about the Danish concept of hygge. Have you heard of it? It's a word for that feeling you get on a cold and foggy afternoon when you're curled up with a cup of tea and some chocolates and your favourite slippers on your feet and the person you most like to be with is curled up there too and all is snug and comfy and copacetic. I can feel my shoulders lowering and my mouth relaxing into a smile just thinking about it. The bliss of being warm and safe and comfortable! Hygge sounds so much more like good news than today's gospel.

Did you hear what was being said to us? Shake off the dust from your feet of homes that do not welcome you, that everyone was harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, that you will be hated because of my name, and worst of all, especially on Father's Day: 'brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.' Where is the good news in this? I want my slippers and chocolates and a whole Danish hygge-fest!

The easiest way to slip back into a hygge world is to dismiss this gospel as a word for its time and not for ours. That the gospel writer is expressing a reality for the early church that we have left behind us. And that is partially true. Whatever fundamentalist preachers might want you to believe, Christians are not a persecuted group in the western world today. Check your privilege if for a moment you believe that this society is out to get you because you attend church. Or better yet talk with a Jew whose cemetery has been desecrated, a Muslim whose mosque has been vandalized, or a black southern Christian whose church has been burned by white southern 'Christians'. There are places in the world where to profess faith in Christ is a path to persecution – we should remember our sisters and brothers of faith in Coptic churches, in Iraq, in parts of Nigeria - but we should not pretend that we share their vulnerabilities and dangers.

What we do share with the early church is a world where, despite its beauty and its wonder, there is violence, injustice and many feel harassed and helpless. There are still families which are torn apart by anger and resentment, homes that, far from being sanctuaries of cozy rest, are places of fear and intimidation for children and women, and occasionally men. I am still haunted by a memory from seminary when I was helping in a poor and understaffed local school. I can still picture one six year old boy crying and cursing and running away from his teacher and myself, begging not to be sent home to his temporary foster home. Not that he was abused there, not in most definitions of abuse, but just that he knew he wasn't truly seen and valued and loved by those who were taking care of him. And let's not forget that unhappy homes are not the prerogative of the poor and the 'other' - there will be people in church today for whom home has been - maybe still is - a place of violence and fear.

This is getting grim for any Sunday, let alone one with the family focus of Father's Day! So let's hunt down the good news that is here. The good news that is harder edged than mere coziness but also far more effective in refreshing the human soul and the human situation. The heart of this for me is those short few words that occur early on - he (Jesus that is) had compassion on them - and what arises from them. Jesus doesn't just wipe away a pitying tear and get on with life. He calls a group together, shares authority with them, and sends them out with orders to make a difference. In the language of that time 'to cast out evil spirits'. In the language of our time to address the social as well as bodily ills that corrupt and twist and destroy individuals and whole societies.

This is one of the foundation stories of the church. This story is one of the reasons that Grace Cathedral, in all its beauty and grandeur and tradition, actually exists. This group of people being sent out to make a difference. This group of people who are, delightfully, called to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. This group of people who are called to be vulnerable, to be non-violent - to be sheep among wolves - but who are also expected to change the world and begin to heal its hurts.

We sometimes talk about the church as a family, but that's an image I'm not too comfortable with. While, for most of us, family is a place of nurture and belonging and love it can also, as we've said, be a place of violence and hurt. I can't forget the one unclaimed body from the Pulse massacre a year ago. A bereaved father refusing to collect his murdered son's remains because that son was gay. 'Family values' as usually defined are not necessarily Christian values. They have become shorthand for valuing those people who most closely resemble us – our own kin first, then our own community, our own race, nationality and class, our own sexual orientation. Family values come to have more to do with deciding who is acceptable and who isn't than with challenging all people to live lives of inclusive love.

This is not something that's actually very easy for us to grasp. This is something that it was not very easy even for Jesus to grasp. There's a line in this gospel that I wish I could ignore, because it challenges my belief that God is for all of us. But that's cowardly for a Christian – we need to look harder at the places where our certainties are challenged not look away – and even more cowardly for a preacher. (It's actually a good rule of thumb – never trust a preacher who ignores the troubling verses) It's where Jesus says to the apostles: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.' In other words, don't go to the 'others' just stay within the family.

It is true that family and clan and race was where Jesus started. Like all of us, this was his comfort zone, his familiar territory. But this was not where Jesus ended. Remember last week's gospel – the resurrected Christ sending his followers into all the world – *that* was where Jesus ended. Our incarnate God was completely human. Like us he had to learn to see the value in the other, like us his heart grew wider and more open the more he experienced God's compassion living in him, like us his life involved a process of growth and learning. There is comfort and consolation here. We cannot judge our own limitations too harshly when we see these in the one we follow. We can know that we, like Jesus, can grow beyond our beginnings into heart-strong lovers of all God's creation.

So, my dear wise serpents and innocent doves, my dear church sent to be God's healing presence in the world, this is the good news for this Father's Day and for every day. Not just that God loves us but that God has a job for us to do. Not one that means we can always sit at home by a warm fire with slippers on our feet hygge-style. But one that means we can be the fire – God's fire to warm and transform the world, a fire of healing, a source of warmth for the desolate and a fierce flame of compassion to burn out injustice. Those of you lucky enough to have loving good-enough fathers still with you, embrace them and celebrate and cherish them. And then turn your face to the world and go and do God's work.