

Lectionary readings: Deuteronomy 30: 15-20; Psalm 119: 1-9; 1 Corinthians 3: 1-9; Matthew 5: 21-37

For reflection and prayer:

- **Deuteronomy 30:** God is a God who wants to bless us. We will only know God's blessing if we set our hearts to live in the way God wants us to. He has given us commandments to help us to know God and to walk in His way. Behind the commandments is God's deep love for us and behind our obedience is our deep love for God and our desire to live as He wants us to.
- **Psalm 119:** Here are these verses paraphrased in 'Psalms for Praying': *'Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who live with spiritual integrity. Blessed are those who honour the Inner Being, who follow You with their whole heart, who enfold the world with love and walk on peaceful paths. You have shown us the way of Truth, the way that leads to freedom. O that I might ever reflect the Light. Then I shall know inner peace, as I surrender myself into Your hands. I will praise You with a grateful heart, as I lean on Your great kindness. As I forsake the path of darkness, O have mercy on me.'*
- **1 Corinthians 3:** Paul is here expressing his frustration with the Christians of Corinth because they have attached to themselves labels, thus causing division. Paul says this is unspiritual behaviour from people who should know better. It seems we haven't learned much down through the centuries, for we are still applying labels to ourselves and acting out of our ego, instead of out of the Spirit of God within us. We are God's people, His planting, His vineyard, and so our focus should be on God. Let's get rid of our labels and concentrate on

developing our spirituality, our relationship with God, and see all people as God's people, one people.

- **Matthew 5:** This teaching of Jesus is very challenging. We would all agree that murder is wrong, but anger, calling someone a fool? We might all feel smug when reading the commandment, 'You shall not kill.' But we have all felt angry and held on to our anger; we have all treated people with disrespect. We need to take seriously how we treat others and Jesus says that, if we are guilty of such conduct, we need to abandon our worship and go and put things right with the one we have hurt or offended, then come and offer our worship to God. After all, acting with love and forgiveness is part of worship, not separate from it. We have to make the first move, Jesus says. Jesus goes on to speak of lust - the way we look at people, lust after someone - this is as bad as committing the deed. We need to recognise our weaknesses and sins and be willing to be drastic in letting go of such things, rather like cutting off the hand that is about to act threateningly towards another. Jesus then goes on to talk about divorce. Here is a commentary from 'Roots': *'Jesus recognises human frailty and the deep pain when relationships break down and people seek forgiveness and reconciliation. But he urges people to live by their word rather than rash promises. How do we recognise situations that are too broken to put right and support broken people in letting go and moving on?'*

A prayer

May God, who created us to live in relationship with one another, go with us. May the Son, who lived in relationships based on inclusion and forgiveness, go with us. May the Spirit, who breathes wisdom and life into community, go with us now and into the days ahead. Amen.