



FOCUS ON FAITH

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THOUGHTS & ACTIONS

Even though the new football season hasn't started yet, it seems to me that the *"beautiful game"* (the phrase the colourful and highly articulate commentator Stuart Hall claims to have coined) is never out of the news.

There is always talk of the staggering (some would say obscene) sums of money paid for and paid to players moving clubs or renewing their contracts. Then there are the predictions of which teams will be facing relegation or which manager will be the first to lose his job. Virtually everyone with any kind of interest in football has an opinion and the game is always a hotbed of rumour and gossip.

Sadly though, it appears that there are more sinister undertones in the background. And it really dismays me when I see and hear about the extremes people are prepared to go to pursue inter-club rivalry.

The recent news that the former Birmingham City manager is moving to take over the position at Aston Villa has resulted in death threats being made. This is on top of the letter bombs sent to the Celtic manager and the physical attack he experienced when a spectator assaulted him during a match – not mention the verbal abuse and hate mail that he's received.

Where's the line between malicious talk and militant action?

Is this just the *"over the top"* reaction of a few – the lunatic fringe – or is it the tip of the iceberg and a deep-seated cultural issue that we have to tackle?

Personally I think it's much more the latter because we know that culture and society is shaped by all of us. Most of us will have come across the *"hot heads"* in a variety of situations but is the reason that they either *"try is on"* or get away with what they do a reflection of the apathy of the rest of us? Often we don't want to get involved or we're too lethargic to even find out what the issues are and so inadvertently, almost by default, we become part of the problem rather than part of any potential solution.

Edmund Burke's famous quote that *"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"* mirrors a verse in the Bible which in effect says if we don't do the good things we know we should do, we are just as guilty as the person who does bad things (see James 4:17).

It's a real privilege to write this column in the Bridgnorth Journal every month, one that I value greatly and it's good to see the *"Letters to the Editor"* section each week. There are times when I don't agree with the comments made especially if they are put across in a vitriolic or patronising manner. But I recognise that this often occurs because of the strength of feeling the contributor holds on a particular subject and it's so easy for us to attack those whose opinions don't agree with ours.

But this leads me to another question. Where's the line between malicious talk and militant action? There has to be a tipping point between inner feelings and external behaviour and it will be different for each of us depending on the severity of the situation we are facing.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus had something to say on this matter. He says that it's our thoughts, desires and attitudes that dictate our actions. Specifically Jesus said, ***"The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart....for from your heart come the evil ideas which lead you to kill, commit adultery, and do other immoral things; to rob, lie, and slander others"*** (Matthew 15:18-19). This is pretty hard-hitting stuff because we all know that if we actually put into practice what we sometimes think there would be chaos.

In our society we are free to privately think what we want to but thankfully we aren't empowered to publicly say and do things that might be considered inflammatory or cause injury to others or their property. We can have opinions but they are tempered by our responsibility for the welfare of others.

So where does this leave us? As a Christian I believe in the ***"do unto others what you'd like them to do to you"*** principle. Why? Because whilst acting in each others best interests may be considered a simplistic ideal, if applied it would be transformational.

The problem is that it has to start somewhere – with you and me. And the challenge is we have to decide if we're up for it.

To find out more about the Christian faith and resources available plus information on services at local Churches together with contact details, please log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk.