

## Listening and EDI

I am riveted by the question of whether Harry is faking his feelings for Shakira just to stay in the show, although she was kissing Tommy in a game of spin the bottle – and Tommy also kissed Emily. Yeah – stupid stupid stupid – reality TV bla bla bla. But what would you prefer? A real piece of literature, like Romeo and Juliet?

I cannot see how Romeo and Juliet is anything other than love island with wealthy families and more articulate characters. Shakespeare's classic tragedy doesn't read like a love story at all – it's anything but. For sure, there are strong feelings between Romeo and Juliet – so strong that they have a destructive impact on everyone around them. There's plenty about eros, and plenty about honour. But nothing about long term commitment. No – it's basically the King James Version of Love island.

This week, I saw a very good friend who told me that If you want to see what love looks like, go to an ontology ward – or a hospice. And see a husband, carrying the bag of bones that is his wife, covered in her own excrement – pulling strands of hair from her head and kissing her because she's still the most beautiful thing he ever laid his eyes on. And they both know that this is natural and true.

This is quite a long-winded way of introducing the topic of listening. To listen to another person, even to listen to a person you love, is to be present, to be woundable, to be transformable by your encounter with them. To converse, to listen, to hear – is to be mutually transformable. Because when that is the kind of person you are, the fruits of who you are speak for themselves.

This is what ethics looks like in the Bible – you cannot but help manifest the stuff that is important to you. To hear others, to hear God – these things are inseparable. To be present, to be woundable, to be transformable. It is painful, and difficult, and nearly impossible, but it is liberating, and life-giving, and life-affirming. And because of that – it can face mess, and difficulty and tragedy. Not painlessly. But it faces them nevertheless.

This term, we have been looking at EDI, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity. And several of you have asked whether I have been attacking or celebrating those things. Well – here is the distinction. When EDI is the natural fruit of who you are, as a person or as an institution – then of course, these things are to be celebrated. But we cannot be the judge of our own moral goodness

But when EDI becomes policy – THEN – we are in the business of attaching artificial fruit to a rootless tree. When these things become box-ticking, performative acts of virtue – then once the wind changes, and a new morality takes root in our world, then EDI will be readily abandoned for whatever moral framework is in vogue.

When we wave progress flags, and flags that tell the world that we are a place of Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity – if we are doing that to celebrate who we are, and give ourselves a jolly good pat on the back, and look with disdain on those godless colleges who don't wave this flag – then we're just playing the Love Island version of EDI.

No. Our flag flying, and our EDI box-ticking, and our celebration of EDI – if it has the slightest hint of value, is inseparable from who we are on a daily basis – in the political and in the trivial. If we are the kind of people who routinely leave our cups and plates on the table of a busy café when we leave – and don't even notice we've done it – in that very act, we have confessed the truth about who we really are. If we support the bombing of a country led by an oppressive regime, while tacitly supporting other oppressive regimes,

we've already told the world who we really are. The way that we view and treat other human beings, is the real declaration of who we really are.

If we dare to fly that flag above our college, then what we should be telling the world is that we have committed ourselves to public – committed ourselves to a lifestyle in which EDI is a fruit. And when we fail – we are telling the world that we can and should be held to account. That is what listening looks like.

And perhaps then, when we have cultivated an attentive disposition, when we are habitually learning how to listen, and facing the challenges, and the difficulties, and the tragedies that this kind of real-life down-to-earth openness brings, then – EDI will, we hope, be a natural fruit of who we are as a people.