





debate continues over assisted dying and, while I can see both sides of the moral argument, my own personal dilemma is whether I would be able to cope- emotionally- with terminating someone else's life. I don't know.

We honour the wartime dead on Remembrance Day but we have lost any illusions that war is a great and glorious way to die. We are simply appalled at the tragedy of so much human loss.

And I think we are starting to wonder uneasily if the culture of "me,me,me, I-can-have-anything-I want" is actually contributing to the escalation of violence, fraud, theft, family breakdown, global warming- all the modern day hazards of living.

When a man decides to kill his wife, his daughter, his pets and himself because he knows that he is about to fall from the top of the heap to the bottom, we see just how desperate, unhappy and terrified "survival of the fittest" makes us. How many more men and women are out there, living in terror of losing their money, their prestige, their physical strength, their mental energy because they know that they will be thrown onto the scrapheap, a scrapheap they themselves have helped to create. If you live by the laws of the jungle, your environment will become a jungle, whether you are talking Mayfair or Brixton.

We do not like living by the laws of natural selection because we are not animals. We cannot cope with the ideology of survival of the fittest because we are not creatures of the jungle. We are something more than this, if we are only prepared to accept it.

The Bible tells us we are children of God. But that can feel like a mixed blessing.

Do you remember in the ancient legend of the Garden of Eden, how Adam and Eve are forbidden to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

"Go on, eat it", says the serpent, "*it will make you like gods.*" They do and it does and the whole process is called "The Curse." And I think we can see why.

We are a higher race than the animal kingdom so, unlike them, we have the power to make choices about life. We can choose to create and we can choose to destroy. We are like "gods," with both knowledge and power.

But with choice comes responsibility. With responsibility comes conscience. With conscience comes love. Like God, we have to bear the weight of our choice, our responsibility, our conscience and our love. And yes, this can feel like a curse.

It means that we cannot please only ourselves. It means that we cannot have- everything-we-want-if-we-are- prepared-to-go-for-it because we have a responsibility to the social systems and structures which affect everybody, not just to ourselves. It means that we shall always agonise over decisions we make that affect other, more vulnerable people. It means that, rather than close our ears and eyes to human suffering in order to keep ourselves happy, we will have to keep looking and listening and bearing the pain that comes with this. It means that rather than simply climb a straight ladder to the top we will be constantly distracted and side-tracked by the complexities of human life and human nature.

It is not surprising that so many of us sink back into animal life, almost without realising it. It can be far easier. I often think that I only keep cats because they can be as hell-bent on getting their own way without any conscience as I wish I could be. It looks like a softer option, especially when you have just read those bits from the Bible about forgiving someone who hurts you seventy-times seven and always being careful to set a good example. Is it a blessing to be children of God or is it a curse?

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I suppose it depends on how seriously you believe in God and how seriously you believe in yourself.

If you cannot believe in yourself as anything more than an animal, living by the laws of the jungle and creating a jungle in which to live, then you won't want anything more and God will be more of a nuisance, an irrelevance, a curse than a blessing.

If you can believe that there is more to you than the animal; that there is something better and greater, then God is a blessing, a huge blessing because it is only with God's help and by God's power that we can climb out of the jungle and create the kingdom of God. We cannot do it on our own.

And if we believe seriously in God, the God we saw in Jesus Christ, then we will believe seriously in love, in the power of love and of forgiveness. We will believe in compassion, in reverence for life, in the intrinsic value of every human soul, including our own. Forgiveness will not be a sign of weakness but a sign of strength. Setting a good example will not be a bore but a privilege. Caring for the vulnerable will not hold us back but push us forward. The threat of losing any of the things by which our society sets out value will still be scary but it will not overwhelm us because we will be living by a whole new set of values which will put us in reach of a whole new source of power.

I don't know why the natural world runs on the basis of natural selection and survival of the fittest. But what I do know is that Jesus Christ worked in precisely the opposite way when it came to dealing with human beings. He went for the weak, the sick, the people who had made mistakes, the people who could not cope with religion, the people whom society had thrown onto the scrapheap. You could call it unnatural selection. But it worked. Through Jesus Christ the human race started to rise out of the animal kingdom and rediscover its identity as children of God. His people did not find money or prestige or comfort or even social respect. But they found God and they found themselves as they had always wanted to be. And so, as St Paul said, *whether we live or whether we die we are of God*. And that has to be as good as it gets. Amen.