

## Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Last Friday night Mrs F and I went 'out out' and ended up at our favourite Indian Restaurant. Caroline always makes an effort and I commented on the top she'd chosen as looking great. Unusually for me, I too had made an effort (!) inasmuch as my sense of fashion and coordination have never been that good but, you know, I'd tried.

In fact, I was so pleased with my shirt that I asked Mrs F if she was impressed with my choice. She said: 'Chris, I love you and I love the shirt though it looks a little "stressed"'. I checked that I'd heard her right: 'did you say "stretched"?' I asked (because let's face it, I'd have felt a whole lot better if she had used the word "stretched" to describe my attire instead !!). She wriggled a little uncomfortably in her seat but confirmed that she had indeed used the word "stressed". I mulled on this and considered a) I have put a little weight on recently b) my shirt may well have shrunk in the wash - unlikely but I was grasping at straws - and c) regardless of either (a) or (b) my appearance to my wife of nearly twenty years meant that my shirt had gone beyond "stretched" to the extent that it was in so much 'pain' that it was crying out "stressed". There are many ways in which I have used the word 'stressed' but to apply it to the stage beyond a shirt being too tight was a new one.

I looked at Mrs F who by now had moved on and was happily munching on a poppadum and said: 'is it because we've been married for nearly twenty years that you feel able to be so honest?'. She looked me in the eye and said: 'Chris, as I've just said, I love you' there was a pause before she concluded 'and your shirt still looks a little stressed'.

I realised two things in this moment; the first was that I was loved and the second was that honesty is a hugely important aspect of that love, even when honesty can be uncomfortable to hear.

I had no doubt whatsoever that I was loved and this was not in any way diluted because of the uncomfortable realisation that I either need to buy a new shirt or lose weight; rather that the depth of love was also being evidenced in her honesty. There's a passage in John's gospel where Jesus talks honestly about what it means to follow Him. Some said 'this is way too hard to understand. Who can accept it?'. And yet the twelve disciples, those closest to Jesus, even if they were struggling to get their heads around His teaching knew, they just knew, that He was worth sticking with. Jesus eventually asks them "Are you also going to leave?" Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God'.

Following Jesus does not mean that we get to hear the answers to our questions that suits us. Instead, we get the answers to the questions that will give us life and help

us to follow Jesus closer. At different times this could look like: Encouragement. Affirmation and/or Challenge. It may mean that sometimes we may need to hear God's word to us through others in a way that makes us examine our appearance and see signs in our lives that are 'ill-fitting' or stressed and need to be addressed so that we can better line up with the character of Jesus.

Over-arching all of this though, there needs to be a recognition that we are unequivocally loved by our Father God who starts all His sentences with us with 'Chris, I love you' Every.Single.Time. This affirmation will always be front and centre with God no matter where we find ourselves. That's a stress-free truth if ever there was..