

Read Psalm 101

This current period of enforced social isolation, when we are ordered to keep ourselves separate from each other reminds me of the pink socks I used to have.

Have you ever had pink socks? Not the kind you went out and bought, but the kind you accidentally ended up with, because you put your white socks in the wash with a red T-shirt? Have you ever experienced that moment of realisation: “Oh, so *that’s* why they say should separate the whites from the colours in your washing machine? I confess I did!

In my defence, I argued (with tongue slightly planted in cheek) that I was acting on principle. Are we not told to save water in our dry and dusty land? And do we not waste water by putting on two loads of washing instead of one? It is in the interests of the planet that we not conduct unnecessary separate washes!

Furthermore, I used to argue (with tongue now even more firmly planted in cheek), look at South Africa. From 1948 until 1994, there was a policy of keeping ‘whites’ and ‘coloureds’ separated. They had a name for it, the Afrikaans word for ‘apartness’: *apartheid*. This policy of segregation was soundly condemned by the world community, the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, and anyone with a sense of human decency and fairness. So ... if it was wrong in South Africa to separate the whites from the coloureds, why is it right in my laundry basket?

By now, I hope, you are beginning to catch my point. Sometimes it is completely the *wrong* thing to do to enforce separation (as in South Africa); but equally it is sometimes quite the *right* thing to do (as in the laundry). So, not being a fan of pink socks, I decided to reconsider my refusal to separate the laundry. I am now much more careful about keeping my white socks from contamination by those other darker colours.

Reflecting on this made me think: maybe there are other areas of life in which I also ought to be careful about cross-contamination? If my clothes can be corrupted and lose their whiteness by mixing with the wrong crowd, perhaps my character can too?

The writer of Proverbs tells us: *Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.* (Proverbs 22:24-25)

And here in Psalm 101, we’re told in verses 2b-5:

I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.

I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.

A perverse heart shall be far from me; I will know nothing of evil.

Clearly, whilst we are to love all of our fellow human beings without exception, we ought to be very careful about whose influence we fall under. Jesus himself set us this example: he loved, and freely associated with, even the worst of sinners – but without ever compromising his own holiness. So, even when this period of enforced social isolation is over, maybe we need to keep practicing some of those precautions we’ve learned to take, this time to avoid spiritual contamination, rather than physical.