



Kindness and courtesy

It's been some tumultuous days politically, and the stakes are high. People just care so much about Brexit, in different ways, but I'm growing aware of the problematic tone of the dialogue.

Here's a tiny example. It's not the worst example, by a mile, but it came to mind; it is a simple tweet from a freelance journalist, Suzanne Moore, that went like this:

"Jacob Rees Mogg is just horrible. There is no other way to say it."

It's been liked 3,000 times, retweeted 200 times and has 172 comments broadly along the lines of: "Actually, I would describe him as a c**t," etc.

I found the tweet in my timeline because a vicar friend had 'liked' it. Now my vicar friend is one of the kindest, loveliest people I know. And I guess she really dislikes Jacob Rees Mogg, but I couldn't help feeling 'et tu, Brute' at her lending support to this tweet.

At this point, I should add that I have never met Jacob Rees Mogg nor am I sympathetic to most of his views. Moreover, singling out Suzanne Moore's tweet is rather unfair. So much of Twitter is so abusive that this is relatively innocent, but it will do as an example. What exactly is writing "Jacob Rees Mogg is just horrible" going to add to the conversation?

It's so simplistically abusive. Maybe he is a nice husband; maybe he is kind to his work colleagues; maybe

he is the sort of driver who patiently waits for you to back out of a driveway, rather than beeping his horn... I don't know any of these things but my guess is neither does Suzanne Moore, yet her tweet would indicate this is not possible. I do know that not many people are 'just horrible'; in fact, I suspect that no one is 'just' horrible.

So I don't agree. But then this non-agreement is the minority view. 3,000 people actively 'like' this attitude, and have given it their click of approval. Twitter swarms with people being publicly abusive about other people, and then followers just joining in the general vitriol.

I suspect that, had it been a newspaper column, Suzanne Moore wouldn't have written that sentence. Arguably, it's the 140 character condensation that supplies the temptation to do so. However, it's really not helpful.

Behind all this lurks the major issue of Brexit, and, crucially, beyond the Brexit division/ People's Vote future, whatever it is, at some stage we will continue to live in the same country and it would be better if we tried to get along with each other.

Learning to curb our everyday abuse would be a start, but I fear it's getting normalised now, so that we don't even notice it... until we are on the receiving end. And then we notice it a lot, and our mental health gets damaged. But it's all a bit late.

Dec 2018. *Thought for the Train* is a short column by the Rev Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.