

*The eminent surgeon was walking through his local churchyard one day when he saw the grave digger having a rest and drinking a bottle of beer. 'Hey you!' called the surgeon, 'how dare you laze about and drink alcohol in the churchyard. Get on with your job or I'll complain to the vicar'. 'I should have thought you'd be the last person to complain', said the grave digger, 'bearing in mind all your blunders which have caused this graveyard to fill up quicker.*

The news these seems to be saturated with people who are pointing the finger at rivals for all sorts of dubious motives. When we point the finger, we're actually pointing three fingers at ourselves. There was a time when people were given the benefit of the doubt but that's becoming rarer. Many people hint at a smoking gun and when none is obvious, they often invent one. The old maxim 'a person is innocent until proven guilty' is often turned on its head. It's so easy to jump on the bandwagon and condemn persons or institutions regardless of who gets hurt. Is this the plank Jesus is asking us to remove?

Did you know that the literal meaning of this word 'satan' is 'accuser'. In the Book of Revelation it says: 'he (Satan) accuses us day and night before our God'. When we become complicit in the blame game, he can find work for us and the plank in our eye gets bigger.

A couple of Sundays ago we heard in the gospel that 'love is always ready to excuse'. People can be labouring under all sorts of pressures when they act out of character.

If you notice at the Last Supper Jesus never humiliated Judas in the front of the other apostles even though he was up to no good. When he left the upper room they thought he was being sent to buy food - they had no idea what he was actually up to and Jesus never explicitly mentions his name. Jesus was silent when Herod mocked and insulted Him. When the Prodigal son turned his back on his

wayward past and returned home, his father didn't read out the riot act to him but was actually mightily relieved when he returned home. The elder brother in the story who accused his younger sibling of messing up his life turned out to be the one 'with the plank in his eye'. But Jesus didn't humiliate him either.

That doesn't at all mean we're gone soft on sin but we should be wise enough never to condemn the sinner with his sin no matter how shameful it appears on the surface. Yes, we should definitely warn people of the bad decisions they made but never ever write them off. In the parable of the wheat and darnel, the landowner warned against weeding out the darnel prematurely, because the good wheat could be rooted out with it. That's the danger when we set about removing the splinter from our brother's eye - we might overlook their redeeming features.

*St Paul says: 'love is always ready to excuse, not accuse'. We leave the ultimate judgement to God who is infinitely just and merciful. He, and He alone, can set the record straight.*