

BBC RADIO ULSTER

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Friday 23rd January 2015

It's cold and dark outside. Christmas is a distant memory, but the credit card bill to pay for it has just arrived. We're back to the daily grind and all those New Year's resolutions have come and gone. The tendency to feel a bit miserable at this time of the year is known as the January Blues. So what do they put on TV to every January to cheer us up – 'Celebrity Big Brother'!

Apparently the ratings of the reality TV show are up this year because some of the beautiful people have been particularly ugly to each other. This week I caught a glimpse of a controversial columnist berating a glamour model for still speaking to a gossip twitterati after he had offended a soap star. As I watched this drama unfold in the Big Brother house I think a little part of me died. But I noticed a very familiar dynamic in the conflict. If you're still speaking

to him after what he did to her then that means you're on his side and you should be on our side. It reminded me of an incident at primary school when Irene Maxwell refused to lend me her pencil sharpener because I still played tig with Titch McCracken in the playground after he'd nicked her Curly Wurly.

It's typical human behaviour we seem to learn at a young age. But it becomes much more dangerous outside of the playground and reality TV shows. In conflicts between peoples, communities and countries, to be abusive to the other side is acceptable to your own side, but to suggest you might listen or talk to the other side is seen by your own side as betrayal. In war each side excuses its own atrocities and jumps on any scrap of evidence that proves the other side is a monster to fear. And of course, when we add into the mix a belief that God is always on our side, the body count rises.

In his song 'God on our side' Bob Dylan sings the lines:

'The reason for fighting
I never got straight
But I learned to accept it
Accept it with pride
For you don't count the dead
When God's on your side.'

If we create God in our own image, with a gun in one hand and a flag in the other, I think we've probably reduced God to a little idol. But if we take seriously the challenge to 'love your enemies' and 'to do good to those who hate you' then I believe it's possible that this impulse to beat the other side at all costs can ultimately be evicted.