

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Reflection – Fifth Sunday of Easter – 15th May 2022

Canon David Pickering

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13.34 & 35

For me these two verses, from the conclusion of this morning's Gospel reading, sum up what the Christian Resurrection life is all about.

In these Sundays of the Easter season, we not only have gospel readings of Jesus' resurrection appearances, but also clear indications of what the resurrection should mean for us. Last Sunday we heard how the Good Shepherd gives eternal life to his sheep. ***My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.*** John 10. 27 & 28. And this resurrection eternal life was pointed to in the Acts reading with Peter raising Dorcas back to life. The resurrection of Jesus is a sign and promise of eternal life for everyone.

This week's Gospel reading takes us back to the Last Supper in John's gospel. Judas has just left the room, so events are inevitably set. In his final conversations with the remaining eleven, Jesus speaks of his coming death in terms of glory: ***Now the Son of Man has been glorified.*** John 13.31 This will be fulfilled through his imminent departure from them: ***Little children, I am with you only a little longer.*** John 13.33. So before he leaves, Jesus gives them a ***new commandment*** John 13.34 on how they are to live: ***that you love one another. Just as I have loved you.*** John 13.34b For us today, hearing these words after Jesus' death and resurrection, we

recognise them as a call to all who follow him. To live the new risen life, to be known as his disciples, our lives must show **love for one another**.

But how is this a new commandment? To love others is nothing new. There are plenty of references in the Old Testament calling for love of others as being part of being faithful to God. In Leviticus the Lord says through Moses: **You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself : I am the Lord. Leviticus 19.18.** The final four words stamp this command with a kind of divine imprimatur or divine injunction.

We, of course, are familiar with the dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer that introduces the parable of the Good Samaritan. To test Jesus, the lawyer asks him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Probably sensing that the lawyer is trying to catch him out, Jesus replies, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" The lawyer correctly recites the summary of the law, but wanting **to justify himself**, then asks, **Who is my neighbour ? Luke 10.29b**

If love of neighbour is enshrined in the summary of the law, what's new about Jesus's commandment in today's Gospel ? The answer can be found in the words, **Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. John 13. 34b.** We can so easily pass over the words **Just as I have loved you.** Jesus's love is a new kind of love. It is costly and sacrificial, like that of the Good Samaritan to an unknown suffering person. In love from the Cross Jesus can say, **Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. Luke 23.34**

This new commandment calls for a sacrificial love towards those we don't necessarily agree with or get on with, even those who may reject us. So how should we regard those who, for one reason or another, we may regard as our opponents or even enemies?

One biblical commentator I consulted claimed there are thirty biblical verses about loving our enemies. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, **But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5.44.** Or the fuller version in Luke's Sermon on the plain, **But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes you coat do not withhold even your shirt. Luke 6. 27 - 29.**

Tony, a priest friend, I once knew, was well known for saying, ***Jesus doesn't ask us to like everyone, that's impossible, but he calls us to love them.*** In my younger days, when I was in trouble at home, my mother would say, ***I don't like you, but I still love you.*** At times it must have been a real struggle for her!

The love of the **new commandment** is not just some heart warming emotion, that makes us feel good and fulfilled. Loving can often be painful and a real struggle, and when we see what's going on in the world around us at the moment, it can be especially hard to follow.

Jesus says that by this sacrificial love, others will see that we are his disciples. If we just love one another in our own narrow world, family groups or chosen friends - and this extends to Church too - then others will hardly notice that love. ***By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,*** said Jesus - so that love must be visible to all. Christian lives should be a witness to this costly love. The love we are called to should seek to bring about a better, more just and equitable life for the rest of humanity. This love should be shown especially to those who are the suffering victims of our world. We and anyone else who sacrifices their lives for others, will then be the true disciples of Jesus.

By God's love and grace we have been called to follow this new commandment and so live a resurrection life of new and sacrificial love.

Amen