

Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

St Pauls' Canterbury

Pentecost 21 OS 30 Proper 25A

Sunday 25 October 2020

Loving God with heart, soul, and mind.

Love as welcome, safety and acceptance

Did you know that pharisees had 631 rules for how to be a good Jew?

We might be feeling as if we have that many to follow when we think of what we can and can't do at the moment!

The pharisees designed laws to help people to live together well as a community in following God.

The pharisees test Jesus by asking which law is the greatest.

Jesus has been under sustained attack in this last week before his death.

Jesus uses this test to sum up what is most important to him.

They are probably the most famous words of Jesus: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and the second is like it love your neighbour as yourself.

Out of all the 631 laws Jesus picks the most important of them all – beginning with the 'shema' from Deuteronomy.

This was the foundation of the laws given by God to the Israelites as they came into the promised land.

Jesus combines it with another law from Leviticus: loving your neighbour. Everything else about living life comes from these two.

Love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

It is easy to say, but hard to do.

For Jesus love was much more than a feeling: it was a commitment and an action.

The *shema* was a statement that the Jews recited as a commitment, it was the closest thing to a statement of faith.

What does it mean for you to love God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind?

And to love your neighbour as yourself?

To love God is to love wholeheartedly, with all that we are.

To love God is to keep seeking God and yearning for God.

To love God with all my soul is about the deepest part of me, my essence, my spirit that goes beyond words.

To love God with all my mind is to be aware of God and to reflect on everything I do in the light of God's love, that I am deeply loved, even though I may not always feel it.

To love whole heartedly is to care about what God cares about. Through Jesus we see that God loves all people, all creation and that is our call to love our neighbour, whoever they happen to be.

We can talk about mission statements and strategic plans and buildings and music, but in the end our foundation as God's people is that the church is a school of love.

In this uncertain and difficult time when it is easy to be fearful and wonder what life will look like as we come out of this time these two great commandments are our guide and foundation stones.

Jesus came among us, lived and died and rose again as one of us to reveal in human form that God is with us, that God loves us all.

Jesus left his disciples with the message that people would know that they were his followers by their love for each other.

Imagine a church that focussed entirely on this – on including people rather than excluding, on welcome and care.

The new Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell used his enthronement sermon to talk about this: 'our job as a church is to show the world what loving one another looks like'.

He used the example of a young woman who went to a local church. She wasn't sure yet whether she believed but she went because 'I feel safe, I feel loved and I feel accepted.'

Isn't that important for us all?

If COVID teaches us anything it is that what we share in common is our humanity, that we belong to each other and that what I do can help or hurt another.

We don't always get it right. It is so easy to turn in on ourselves, either from fear or self-interest.

As Cottrell says it is easy to pull up the drawbridge on the rest of humanity.

God's call is to love – to love God who showers us with love and then let love flow through to those around us – in welcome, inclusion and acceptance.

Stephen Cottrell said in conclusion: 'Let's put this sign up outside our churches, let's wear it on our sleeves and declare it to the world. Everyone is welcome, here is a place, and here is a people where you will be safe, where you will be loved, where you will be accepted.'

Here is a blessing from A Black Rock Prayer Book:

*The world now is too dangerous and too beautiful
for anything but love.*

May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone.

Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor.

May your hands be so blessed

that everything you touch is a sacrament.

Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.

May your feet be so blessed you run to those who need you.

*And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire,
that your love, your love, changes everything.*

*And may the blessing of the God who created you, loves you,
and sustains you, be with you now and always.*

Lections:
Deut 34.1-12
Psalm 90.1-6, 13-17
Matthew 22.24-46