

Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Easter 5C

Sunday 14th May 2022

Love one another: What does love look like?

What does love look like?

We all know what it's not – the destruction of cities, the killing of innocent civilians. It isn't violent, it doesn't betray, manipulate or threaten. It doesn't judge who is in and who is out.

This short passage from John's gospel pretty much sums up what it means to be a Christian, to be those who are loved and called to love.

As Jesus heads towards his death he gives his followers a new commandment – love one another as I have loved you.

He says it three times so he *really* wants them to hear it.

He doesn't give them a list of instructions or a rule book to follow of dos and don'ts, or a list of who is pure and who is not.

He says love one another as I have loved you.

What is astonishing is that he says this just as Judas is walking out the door to betray him to his death. This has happened just after Jesus has washed their feet and they have shared a final meal. After these words he predicts that Peter will deny him.

So between these two bookends of betrayal and denial Jesus says love one another.

He knows he is going to his death soon. He doesn't start by berating Judas and saying what a horrible man Judas is but says love one another as I have loved you.

Sometimes we'd prefer the rule book. Yet when God came to the Jews in the Old Testament when he gave a bunch of rules it didn't work out too well. It wasn't long before they broke most of them!

God comes to us in a person, in Jesus. It is in a relationship with Jesus that we learn about what love looks like.

Jesus is reminding us that at the heart of who we are is to love one another as Jesus has loved and continues to love us.

When we look in the gospels we can see many stories of what Jesus' love looks like. It is a love that is present, that gives, that is with us.

At the heart of Christianity is to love like Jesus.

When we love we show that we are God's followers.

In a time of transition and change, a time of uncertainty and fear it is easy for us to think that how we are to respond has to be about complex strategies and marketing.

When Jesus and his followers faced their time of change and uncertainty he distils it to love one another.

Over the last 7 weeks I have been quite ill and not long before that my father died.

I have found myself with the shoe on the other foot.

Instead of being the one who ministered and did things I have experienced what it is like to be ministered to, to be loved at a time when I have felt pretty vulnerable.

It has been easy to feel frustrated and think I should be doing things and yet it has been a time to receive.

In Hobart I had many experiences of what real love looks like – the carer at Dad's nursing home holding my hands and looking into my eyes and giving me a hug as she said I know I'm not supposed to, but I'm doing it anyway.

There was the rotary lunch on a day they declared was Dugald's day where they shared so many stories of him and set aside the no 1 raffle spot as Dad's permanently.

There was the chief scout Commissioner's wife Helen who rang and said anything we can do for you will be just a small thing compared to what Dugald gave us.

In my illness it has been comforting to be surrounded by love,. There have been the people who have gone to get things for us at the drop of a hat, the meals dropped on the doorstep, the messages and the how are you's?

There has been kindness, acceptance and understanding.

These are all signs of loving like Jesus.

When Bishop Stephen Cotterell became Archbishop of York he asked his staff what 'would you do if you were Archbishop?'

The gardener told him a story of a young woman he knew that went to a local church.

She is someone who doesn't really believe but would like to but hasn't got there yet.

Why do you keep going? he asked her.

She replied 'Because I feel safe here, I feel loved, I feel accepted.'

Isn't this what love looks like? – to feel safe, accepted for who we are and loved.

Isn't this what is at the heart of being God's people?

What if we focussed on this as a church?

This is what God gives us as Christians. This is who we are called to be as Church to show the world what loving others looks like.

The problem is that there are times when the human heart so easily turns in on itself. It is easy to become focussed on ourselves because of fear and worry we forget about loving the other.

Jesus' call is as pertinent today as it was when he first spoke the words.

If Jesus was asked to respond to what is happening now in the world, in Ukraine, in arguments about sexuality and whether the poor deserve a pay rise he would say love one another.

Love one another.

Christianity isn't about just loving one, it is about loving another.

Lections:

Acts 11.1-18

Psalm 148

Revelation 21.1-6

John 13.31-35.