

Easter 6 – St Aidan’s and Wesley – 13th May 2012

Theme: “The power of love”

Reading: John 15: 9-17

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” (vs 12)

Introduction

Today’s Gospel continues the passage from last Sunday’s reading where Jesus says: “I am the vine, and my Father is the gardener.” It is in this context that Jesus talks about love and we have the command from him to “Love each other as I have loved you.” (vs 12). Also we have the call to “remain in his love” or as some versions say “abide in his love” as well as “to go and bear fruit”. Hence there is a huge amount in only a few verses here and this is one of the reasons that this passage is split in two in the Lectionary. Let us take a closer look at some of these aspects within the Gospel for today.

Going deeper!

You may remember the Beatles hit song in the turbulent 1960’s, ‘All you need is love.’ Reactions to this song varied from an enthusiastic embrace of love as a simple solution to the world’s problems to a critical rejection of love as a dreamy emotion that would distract people from the real problems of the world and so solve nothing – hence love was rejected. Of course the love that Jesus talks about is quite different to this discussion on the Beatles song but still people think of love as ‘namby, pamby’ or soft and ineffectual.

In our English language we do not have the differentiation of the types of love that is found particularly in the ancient Greek language. The form of love mentioned here translates to ‘agape’ and its cognates. The word comes into the Latin as ‘caritas’ and thence into the English as ‘charity’. Unfortunately this word today has connotations to ‘hand outs’ and is not what is meant. Hence ‘love’ is the best English word. ‘Love’ here in a sense is a theological virtue, an excellence of character that God has by nature and in which we participate by grace. Such love is primarily interested in the good of the other person, rather than one’s own self-interest. It does not attempt to possess or dominate the other. One can have a few good friends, maybe a special partner, but one can have ‘agape’ for all.

For Christians the true archetype of love is found within the inner life of God.

According to Jesus' analogy, the disciples' relationships to one another should conform to their relationship to Jesus which in turn finds its ultimate example in Jesus' relationship with God the Father. This is the purest form of love. Hence this section begins with the words: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." vs 9.

The setting changes understanding

Words can be so important and our interpretation of them.

The words you hear in one time and place can have an entirely different impact on you if you hear them in another time and place. "I hope you are doing well" may seem like a casual conversation or a polite greeting if we say that to some-one in general discussion. Put those same words to some-one who is struggling with illness or struggling with the death of some-one close to them then those same words take on a totally different connotation. 'I hope you are doing well.' Meaning shifts with setting.

In John's Gospel, written later towards the end of the first century, to a struggling, persecuted community to offer hope for the future we see new meaning in Jesus' words.

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no-one than this, that they lay down their life for their friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." Vss 12-14

While said to the disciples before Jesus' death, these words would not have been initially understood. Said after the resurrection, these words had new meaning. Said to a persecuted early church struggling for survival they took on new meaning. Said to the church struggling with apathy in Australia today they have yet a different impact.

Into this we have the concept of friendship with Jesus

The word friend (*philos* in the Greek) is from the verb 'to love' (*phileo*). To be a friend with Jesus is to love Jesus, keep his command to love one another and to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.

This concept of friendship and being in a relationship with Jesus was a new concept for a people used to being dominated, in servitude and under oppressive authority.

Today we do not realise the uniqueness of what Jesus was saying back then because of our freedoms, our open relationships and our

acknowledgement of God's gift of love to us in Christ Jesus. Things have changed in our world but it is good to recognise the relational dimension of God's love through Christ and see it at work today in our relationships with one another. We will not always agree with other Christians, there will on occasions be differences due to differing understandings or misunderstandings in a variety of areas but we are called still to love one another in the name of Christ.

Go and bear fruit

Jesus gives the imperative to 'go and bear fruit'. This in a sense is part of the 'sending out' of the disciples. They are not to become an insular, introspective group of individuals that wither on the vine. Rather, the call is to look outwards and go into the world. The 'bearing of fruit' is not specifically explained here but is explained further in such passages as Galatians 5:22 'But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.'

Conclusion

A solid passage of teaching that ends with the command re-iterated.
"This is my command: Love each other."

Certainly the Jesus love is no 'namby,pamby' love.

It includes:- challenging corruption and deceits

- caring for the welfare of others, even our enemies
- forgiving seventy times seven those who hurt us
- giving without wanting gratitude or praise
- embracing outcasts and welcoming sinners
- accepting rejection and suffering while still trying to do our best
- lending without expecting to be repaid

Possibly we need to change the Beatles song to "All you need is Christ's love" but even then we will find that it is a love which is much misunderstood and will continue to polarise people in their perception and understanding of that love.

However, may we as followers of Jesus take his command to love seriously in the way we live out our faith. Amen.