



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 15 May 2022

Easter 5

Today's worship will help us explore God's invitation to be fully alive through what God commands – to be people who love in both words and deeds.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another."

John 13:34

An Illustration to set the scene

There's a song in the musical *My Fair Lady* where Eliza Doolittle, the young female character, sings

"Words! Words! Words! I'm so sick of words! I get words all day through; first from him, now from you! Is that all you blighters can do? Don't talk of stars burning above; if you're in love, show me!"

She is being coached to sound like a high-born lady when really she comes from a poor background.

Words to her are a tool that could lead her into a different life but she wants to go beyond words to the reality they contain.

If Freddie the young man loves her, then he has to do much more than tell her pretty stories, dream marvellous dreams or utter polite phrases – she wants action!

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Jesus is telling his disciples to love each other as he has loved them, so what does that look like?

Well, he spent most of his time with them, forgave and healed them, got cross and wept and feasted with them.

Jesus taught them with stories and through his example – he washed their feet and, rather than run away, he went to his death in Jerusalem with them still following on.

The Gospel passage today is very short but full of urgency – Jesus tells them he’s only got a little while longer with them and that they cannot come with him to his destination.

The new commandment is not just to love in an airy-fairy way but

“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

That’s what the love has to be like – like the love Jesus has shown them.

This love has been tough love – with both joy and anger, feasting and fasting, forgiving and healing, leading and serving.

It has not been a gush of emotional feeling, but a purposeful and costly relationship of being together so that nothing is hidden any longer.

Living by the commandments of God is tough when you take time to explore them more deeply.

Abraham heard that commanding voice and it seemed to ask him to do something quite contrary to the commandment not to kill.

On the face of it, God's command would bring death to his son and thereby the loss of all that promise of descendants "**as numberless as the stars**".

Likewise the commandment to love sounds odd to some people, since love is often a feeling and we can't always feel such things to order!

God's commandments lead to abundant life.

Abraham receives back his son.

Today's reading from Revelation (read it out loud) offers the underlying truth that God's desire is for a new heaven and a new earth without mourning or crying or pain, and that death shall be no more.

In Acts, Peter's anxiety about keeping the food laws almost means that non-Jews would have been excluded from the Gospel if Peter had not listened carefully to the vision God gave him: "**What God has made clean, you must not call profane.**"

Peter's decision about whether non-Jews could be included in God's kingdom came not from a commonsense decision but from **a renewed understanding of God's love for the whole creation**, which God had made clean. He had begun to show the love of Jesus by *eating with non-Jews*, just as Jesus had eaten with those considered to be outside the love of God, and then saw God's loving action pour the Holy Spirit on these same people.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

God's commands bring new life to Abraham and Isaac, to the whole creation in Revelation, to Gentiles as well as Jews in Acts, and it all comes from the beloved *Wisdom of God who dwells with humankind*.

So keeping God's commands is not a tick list of things to achieve, but a way of life to bring abundant life not just to ourselves, but to our communities.

Jesus' tiny community of twelve plus the women who travelled with and ministered to them had to show commitment to that community and to its well-being.

The Church as it came into being was known for its loving care.

The command to love pulls it all together because it makes sure we don't just offer one another or the world fine words, but instead offer the actions of Jesus who feeds and washes, encourages and gets angry sometimes and goes to the bitter end and beyond for love of the world.

Jesus is the Word who goes beyond words to show love to us all and calls us to do the same.

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another."

John 13:34

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst some folk are not able to meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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