

Sermon 5th Sunday after Easter 2016

The circumcised Jews were surprised that the Holy Spirit also fell upon the gentiles and this was even after hearing Jesus say before his death” I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

This great new commandment can fill us with a sense of hopelessness and failure. But let’s return to the context, Jesus is talking to his disciples, who even at this late stage during the Last Supper are failing to understand and will later betray him. Jesus is realistic, he knows we are fallible human beings just as they were, he knows the people he has chosen then and now. To these people he entrusted and continues to entrust his message. They are worthy because they are loved, this is our only qualification for the task we have been given.

This commandment to love is not entirely new, most of the Old Testament law show God trying to help Israel become a loving community. A

community that will treat all who come into contact with it with justice, love and care. In the Gospel writings Jesus shows us God’s love, which is the very nature of God, and we are called to show others that same nature.

We are called to reflect back that love that Jesus has shown to us his followers. In doing that we will be reflecting the God we believe in. We were created in God’s image, and now we are to be restored in that image again, by showing the love of the Father and the Son.

The love that made the cross inescapable, the cross that Jesus turns to glory – the glory of the Father. At the cross God is seen in Christ and Christ is seen in God. What is revealed in the cross is the love of God in Christ. In the cross we see that love is the whole nature of God in his dealings with us.

However I think it can be agreed that throughout the ages the Christian church has not been the best example of this love, we are human, and just as those early Christians argued, divided and argued again so has it

continued, sometimes in a barbaric way. Now the church can be accused of sexual abuse, homophobia, of problems with women in authority, of sectism, righteousness and splits. Thank goodness God loves us because sometimes it is very hard to love ourselves.

These problems happen because we are still human, we have still failed to live reflecting the love of God. We are still failing to live in the love of God, to be the loving community he has been trying to help us become.

Barriers should fall in the face of such love, Christ has broken through death and so all new things become possible. If we are the resurrection people, our lives will act this out and gather others into the Kingdom through the way we refuse to live by old values, prejudices, the old order of sin. Love was very expensive but it is the new way to live and we are to share it lavishly.

Other people, non-Christians, judge us by how we behave and what we say. We are asked to examine ourselves in the light of the

resurrection and this commandment of love for one another.

But knowing that we are loved by the God who knows everything about us is the beginning of fulfilling this commandment. We do not have to generate this love ourselves, because through grace we are given it. We know that God is love, we know that he loves us however unworthy, lacking in understanding and faith we are.

But we are asked to move beyond ourselves, beyond our safe boundaries, to step into the unknown, to love God more, to love others more, even those that are different to us. Peter and the disciples had to learn to accept the 'unclean', the non-Jews, they had to move on from their past and their mistakes into the world that needed to be shown God's love.

Let us be the best we can be at reflecting God's love to others, to demonstrate the very nature of God which is love. We will not be perfect, but we can try.