

**Sermon for 17th May 2020:** Acts 17.22-31; Psalm 66.8-20; 1 Peter 3.13-22; John 14.15-21

There couldn't be two more poignant readings for us today in the midst of the challenges we have faced and continue to face as we begin to gently step out again – and we can remind ourselves that while Paul was speaking on the other side of the resurrection, the Gospel reading sets Jesus and the disciples at the last supper – Jesus is trying to prepared the disciples for what is coming – reminding them of God's unconditional love – that they won't be left alone no matter what. But while God's love is unconditional – to receive the benefits – there has to be obedience – spiritual obedience which will ultimately lead to physical obedience – you will keep my commandments isn't a suggestion – it is a call to put love into action – to ground the emotional sentiment into a love that heals and restores and comforts and strengthens..

Both of the readings today are significant in their own right as reminding us that God is always with us – he created us – loves us – and longs to be in a two-way relationship with us – and through Jesus in his living, dying and rising to new life God is dwelling within us through his Holy Spirit.

This is now an intentional relationship. We are conscious that this relationship is true and honest and it is going somewhere in the plan to mobilise us towards a more honest and authentic living out of our life, our loves, and our longing quest for freedom, peace and hope – for ourselves, for others and for the world. When we are woven into that circle of love – that relationship between God the creator – his Son Jesus the sustainer – and the Holy spirit – the maintainer – then we are truly able to live a grace-filled life out and pass it on to others who in turn will do likewise – unconditionally – not conditional on whether things are happening that we like, or want – or whether we are getting our own way. This is an unconditional relationship – where we accept people, places and things for who they are – treating them as we would want to be treated and doing our best to be tolerant in the differences – and even find a way to celebrate them..

This is the theme running through the call of Jesus to follow his commandments – there are only two – to love God with all our heart – and to love our neighbour as ourselves....

We now get a clearer understanding of Paul's great sermon about God the Creator – not made of human hands – or not a product of human imagination –

He doesn't quote chapter and verse about the scripture interpretation – it is there, but he doesn't need to – he meets them where they are and acknowledges their own experiences of an unknown God and then introduces them to the God of the Gospel – verse 23 – <sup>24</sup>[a] God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.'

And he assures them that we too are God's offspring. Like a loving parent, he has let the ignorance broken behaviour go on for long enough and he is now calling for repentance – calling for a turning back of it all – a change of heart and mind so that new life – a new way of living – embedded on the love that he commands can come to bear, and he shows us the way of that through Jesus – who in turn shows us in the flesh what is happening in the spirit – dying to brokenness and hopelessness – and rising to new life whole and hopeful and free from the bondage of the sinful, broken ways of the past... It is time to not only talk the talk – but to walk it.... And if ever a theme of God's word that was relevant today – it is surely this idea of putting down the old ways – and learning new ideas and ways and practicing them continually – because practice makes perfect. We strive to love as God loves us - perfectly....

And of course, those commandments of our Lord say it all again –

<sup>15</sup>If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Verse 16-18 - <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. <sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. <sup>18</sup>I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

You will see me because you have been open and you have trusted and you have believed and so therefore you will see - and Jesus continues to assure – although you won't see me for a little while, he

says, you will – you will see me in a new way. I will send you an advocate which means 'I will send you the one called to your side' – an intercessor.

Jesus is sure that his followers will experience his love in a new way. By following his commandments we are told that we will love and be loved – by the Father – our Father – through Jesus – in the power of the loving Holy Spirit. 'I will love them and reveal them to myself' he says - and the amazing hope and conviction of these words is that the revelation that we are promised is quite simple – pure love.... Amen.

Prayer:

We are your children, O God:

We trust that you have not left us alone

As you show us the love that is the way, the truth the life of all that is good -

Help us always to show that love in all that we do,

so that all may be filled with the Spirit of your way, your truth and your love.

Amen.

JDS