

Love

24 4 16

Almighty God,
who through your only begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us
the gate of everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us
you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good effect.

Our text may be found in the gospel according to John, chapter 13 and verse 34:

**'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.'**

Good to be back. I do like being here at St Mary's. It's like coming home and, no matter how much I love it in France, I have to say to you that I also love being here with you today.

Love is just four letters, a four letter word in English, but love embraces a rich range of meaning. And today I like to focus briefly on the night that Jesus was betrayed, Maundy Thursday when sat at table with his friends, the Twelve and he shares this new commandment with them – the injunction to love one another.

Well, I did just say the Twelve but sadly Judas Iscariot has already got up and left – gone out alone into the night. And I'm not sure whether a young John Mark, in his loose-fitting linen garment, has slipped into the Upper Room to be on the fringe of the in-crowd that he so admires.

Jesus has shared the Last Supper with them – bread and wine that will come to have such significance for us as symbols of what it can cost to love. Before they sat down to eat, Jesus has got up, knelt down and washed their feet – a powerful example of what it can mean to love. And now, Jesus shares a principle with them that is our text today:

‘I give you a new commandment, that you love one another
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.’

New ? Not really. Love, as an informing principle, is an underlying theme of the covenant relationship between God and Man. Each covenant in the Old Testament – between God and Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah – each embodies the love of God for Man and our response by mirroring that love. New, it certainly is in the way that it is being expressed here, now, by Jesus. In Luke's gospel (10 v37), it is a lawyer when asked by Jesus who identifies the principle of love of God and love of neighbour which Jesus clarifies and illustrates by the parable of the Good Samaritan. In Matthew (22 v 37 – 40), it is Jesus himself who summarises the Commandments, the Law of God, in these two principles from Deuteronomy 6 v5 and Leviticus 19 v18 – first, the love of God; then, the love of neighbour as one loves oneself. But here, in John's gospel, Jesus has personalised the principle, shaped it to the ears and eyes and minds of those he's loved for the past 3 years.

So what does it mean to love ?

- To respect;
- To be in touch;
- To listen to;
- To be there when needed.

If you love someone, you will respect them – value them – cherish them.

If you love someone, you will want to be in touch – connected – in communion.

If you love someone, you will listen to them – pay attention – be in conversation.

If you love someone, you will be there for them – present – actively helping.

So when Jesus is on the point of leaving them, shortly to be arrested, taken away and executed the next day, he shares this living principle with them – the recipe for the a good life – Love – love of each other.

And my question to you today must simply be ‘Can you ? Do you ?’

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Mary the Virgin and All Saints, Potters Bar

24th April, 2016

