

Dear Friends,

This week I intend to look at the epistle reading rather than the Gospel. It's a passage from 1 John 3 that looks at loving God and loving each other. There are some people who are very practical and down to earth who struggle with passages like this. They ask questions like "How can we love God when we can't see him and we can't fully understand him?"

You can love someone or something you can see and know. You can love strawberries, or your dog, or your husband or wife, but God is a different matter altogether. We have to accept that God is beyond our sight and our understanding. In the Old Testament Moses asked to see God but that couldn't happen. We accept that God can't be seen by human eye. It's perfectly reasonable to ask "How can we love God when we can't even see him?"

We may not be able to see God himself but we can see signs of his presence. When we look around at the world in which we live we see evidence of God as creator and giver of life. We don't just see evidence of the existence of God, we see evidence of God's love for us. The Bible declares that God is love. When we look at his creation, we realise that he has given all this because of his love for us. God has shown his love for us most clearly of all by sending his son Jesus into the world. 1 John tells us that if we want to know what love is then we should look at Jesus dying on the cross for our sake, that is love. The evidence we have of God's love for us convinces us that he is worthy of our love. Even though we can't see God he is most definitely worthy of our love.

Down to earth practical people might then ask "How can we express our love for God?" It's all very well talking about loving God, but what does it really mean in practice. True love is always expressed in practical ways. Which leaves us with the question "In what practical ways can we express our love for God?"

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament closely link love for God with love for our fellow human beings. That doesn't mean that they are two versions of the same thing. To love others doesn't necessarily involve loving God. There are plenty of good caring people who have no time for God at all, who would be most annoyed if you suggested their concern for others was because of a love for God. But we cannot love God without loving others, our love for God is revealed in the way we show our care and concern for one another. How can we claim to love God, whom we can't see, if we don't love our brothers and sisters whom we can see only too clearly.

1 John makes it clear that the church, the Christian community, should be a sign and symbol of the new community of heaven. Our relationships with one another should be guided by love for each other. We have to admit that those who look at the church from the outside often don't see much resemblance to the life of heaven. That is the challenge that is before us.

Best wishes,

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