

Greetings,

I hope you are all keeping safe and well. This week I am reflecting on John 15:9-17,

<sup>9</sup> “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.

When I was very young, maybe five or six years old, my parents would take my brothers, sisters and me to church. I don’t remember doing this but according to my mum one time after the service I climbed into the pulpit while the microphone was still on and said. “Excuse me everyone, I just wanted you to know Jesus loves you.” On the face of it this could easily just be a cute story of an adorable child, (now a not so adorable adult) repeating what his parents had brought him up to understand and believe. However, this belief is the core message of the gospel we proclaim.

Jesus’s love for us is the central theme of this passage; however, it comes with a challenge, “Now remain in my love.” This is followed by verse 10 where Jesus says, “If you keep my commands you will remain in my love...” What does this mean? If we don’t follow God’s commands does he no longer love us? Of course this is not the case, especially bearing in mind what Paul writes in Romans 8:38-39,

<sup>38</sup> “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. <sup>39</sup> No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So if there is nothing we can do to separate us from God’s love what does Jesus mean when he says, “remain in my love”? What I believe Jesus is saying to us here is that we should live our lives as an expression of the love that God has for us. Jesus sets out how we achieve this in verse 12, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” Here Jesus sets himself as the example for us to follow.

In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus reveals just how vital love is when he responds to the question “What is the greatest commandment?” His response to this is:

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’<sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’<sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

All of Jesus’s life and teaching was an expression of what it means to live this teaching. While his teaching pointed people to God, His actions of healing and caring for people showed how to love others. The fullness of this is encapsulated in Jesus’s death and resurrection through which we have been called into His love. The challenge for us then is to share this love with each other and others.

The question for us now is, how do we emulate this love Jesus has shown us? We do this through living in the community and sharing fellowship as Christ’s Church. We show love to one another when we listen to each other and pray with and for each other, when we care for and support each other, and through acts of kindness. Just as Jesus always met people where they were, so he meets us where we are and loves us and accepts us. We share that love by meeting others where they are physically, spiritually and emotionally, and accepting them as they are. We not only apply these principles to the community of the church we are part of but are called to share it with those outside of it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “Just as our love for God begins with listening to God’s Word, the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them.” As we reflect as a church and individually, listening to God, through his Word and the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit in prayer, whilst also listening to the communities we are part of locally, nationally, and globally, in what ways is God calling us to express His love and how can we reveal this love to others?