

Year A Easter 6 10th May 2026

Acts 17: 22-31. Peter 3: 13-22. John 14: 15-21.

If you love me...

Our gospel reading today, is a continuation of the well-used chapter that is part of Jesus' farewell discourse, reassuring his disciples that God has a place for them in his kingdom, and that Jesus himself is the way, the truth and the life.

In this pericope (the term for an extract from scripture) Jesus starts with what seems a very simple command, 'If you love me, keep my commands.' And in verse 21 riffs on it by saying, "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."

In these sentences Jesus is making clear the direct link between loving him and following his command, what we could think of as love shown through obedience to his command. Or love and a deep desire to follow his teachings and his commandments. Sometimes obedience sounds a bit too much like slavishly and unthinkingly following someone and jars to the modern ear. However, in this case, if we love Jesus, we won't go wrong if we do follow his commandments, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength – as we state in the summary of the Law each week. In that summary we also state that "we shall love our neighbour as ourself".

So could those be the commands of Jesus we should adhere to? Well, yes, but Jesus, in this particular speech is explicitly referring back to the New Commandment he gave to his disciples earlier that evening as he washed their feet; (John 13:34) 'A new command I give you:

love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

Simple! Not at all hard to understand, we might think. That all we say and do, in all aspects of our lives, not just on a Sunday morning for 90 minutes, must be motivated by Christ's love for each one of us, and that we therefore reflect that in how we behave and treat all others.

But in reality, how do we mark our own score card? Given Christ's unconditional love for us, can we honestly say that we match that in our daily lives, in our relationships, in our care of others, our neighbours (locally and globally), the sick, the poor, the imprisoned?

I do often ponder the simple words of 'love one another as I have loved you', and then look at the inability of human kind to actually get anywhere close to this ideal. In moments of honesty, I can reflect on my life and feel convicted that I have not been able to meet this command consistently throughout my life.

In the Greek New Testament, the word we translate into English as 'love' is 'agape' (ἀγάπη), which is the highest form of love, unconditional and selfless, that God has for each one of us and is modelled for us in human flesh in the life of Jesus.

When we are asked to love – for all our relationships to be based on agape, we open ourselves up, we become vulnerable and most of us don't like to feel vulnerable. We have to trust others, and sadly most of us have had that trust abused, so we become suspicious or cynical. Once bitten, twice shy...

I know that when I have done my best to show God's love, both prior to my ordination, and after, I have occasionally been bruised by encounters. It does make one more wary. I try to counter this

through prayer and through my confidential conversations with my spiritual director. I seek to understand the interaction and the other person, to hold them with the gaze God does, who loves everyone unconditionally. Yes, what a scandal! Gd loves all people, each and every human being.

Unfortunately for us, Jesus commandment is very clear. He doesn't say 'act like you love someone', so through gritted teeth or with a hardness of heart, we interact with someone. There is a simple and clear commandment.

No matter how hard it may seem, don't you yearn for a world where each one of us shows the same commitment to love each other as Jesus showed to everyone he met; with honesty, integrity, being genuine and generous?

When we survey the world today, let alone cast our eyes over the last two thousand years, we can see so few examples of Jesus' command being lived out; in fact we can spot those who do live it out in some way because there are so few, and we tend to call them saints! I think this proves that on our own we can't achieve obedience to Jesus' command.

Now, luckily for us, Jesus, in our reading, tells his disciples, and us, that God will send an advocate, the Spirit of Truth to help us. We can't do it alone. Jesus knows this. God knows this. The Holy Spirit is with us to help and guide us. When we truly let the Holy Spirit abide in us, it becomes possible for us to be obedient to Jesus' command. And when we come together, we create a community that can offer that love, fed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We receive God's unconditional love. We are commanded to share it with others. We are to love as we are loved. The love we are

commanded to share is the love we are given. We show our love of Christ by keeping his commandments.

The source of our strength is Jesus, the Christ, and we receive the strength to do God's will by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit feeds us, often through quiet prayer and stillness, or when we ask for the Holy Spirit to be with us as we reflect on our lives, on what has happened in the last day.

Jesus commands us to love one another. We can only do this through the power of the Holy Spirit. I ask you to reflect on what this world could be like if only more people followed that commandment. We can do what we can do, here, in this time and place. Maybe we start by asking for the Holy Spirit to equip us, to guide us, to be with us. Maybe we find time each day to invite the Holy Spirit into our lives. Especially if we say 'Yes' when Jesus says, "If you love me..."