

## Trinity 20 Year A - Reformation Sunday

The injunctions clearly to the fore in all our readings today are to love God and love neighbour. This becomes a sign of hope to the world – a sign of hope for everyone, no matter who or what they are. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul seems to be surprised with how dear the Christians of Thessalonica have become to him. Paul says, ‘*So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.*’ There is a note of surprise. In today’s Gospel, Jesus says “It’s very simple: Love God. Love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus says to us, ‘Did you get that? Because honestly, there’s nothing else.’ Jesus then goes on to befuddle the Pharisees with an elegant little logic puzzle about who Messiah is really. He’s tired of the Pharisees asking tricky questions, so he asks them a question and when they answer, he shows them that they are wrong, using their own rules of argument. Jesus’s answer to their trick question about the greatest commandment, contains more than enough wisdom and challenge in it for 2000 years of the history of humanity. Easy to understand, hard to do.

As long as we’re thinking of this idea of loving God and neighbour as being compelled to make some sort of emotional commitment, we’re stuck. We can’t manufacture loving feelings. Perhaps it is more helpful to consider the commandment to love God and love neighbour not as a feeling but an action. If the goal is to act as IF I love my neighbour’, I know what that looks like and it has nothing to do with what God calls us to do.

C.S. Lewis proposed in a series of radio lectures (and later a book) that there are four kinds of love in the world.

The first Lewis calls **STORGE** – a Greek word meaning an empathy bond which is a kind of generalized affection for familiar people like those we work with or meet socially. It is un-earned, ephemeral and not too attached. It’s an emotion.

The second is **PHILIA** which is closest to the love that a family has for each other. Philia is a deep attachment for people who are similarly deeply attached. It also is an emotion.

The third kind of love is **EROS**, named after the Greek God of Love. This is what we most often think of when we think of love – Valentine cards – not that I’ve had any for years, sloppy kisses and loving feelings, although not an out of control sexuality. Lewis’s exposition of Eros got him into trouble when the talks (on which the book is based) were transmitted in the United States! How things change. This kind of love is also an emotion.

The fourth kind of love is **AGAPE**, which is the kind of overflowing love that God shows for us all the time. This one is an action, not an emotion. We are called to offer this kind of love regardless of a person’s worth or merit, or even their lovability. We are called to take it from God’s fountain and spread it all over the world. Agape is a verb, not a noun, and when Jesus says the word ‘love’ the Greek word he uses both for loving God and loving your neighbour is agape – a verb, so the kind we do, not the kind we feel. Agape is Greek, and when it is translated into Latin it becomes caritas, and English - charity. Thinking of

Agape or Caritas as a verb seems to me to make real sense of Paul's thoughts on the three great theological virtues of Faith Hope and Love.

But what of loving our **neighbour** as one's self? - something we hear in both the OT lesson and the Gospel today. Well, there is no hint in the Bible of the modern psychological emphasis on the need for self-esteem and the idea that one must love ones' self before loving others. – rather it is the other way around. Love the other and you love yourself – indeed, you **FIND** your true self. Neighbour doesn't necessarily mean the person who lives next door to you as much as it means whoever is in your vicinity.

How do we measure up to this God-flowing Love – Agape or Caritas? Well, of course many (if not most) do it in so many ways. Places where Caritas is at work in our community are in food banks, childcare, people in our community who cook for others, those who participate actively in the running of the church and in outreach to the wider community, our choir and musicians, servers – those many people who make it a priority to keep this house of worship running. Our commitment to including all kinds of people in this community are times when we pray, when we send a card or give a call to cheer someone up, whenever we make a choice to reach out to each other. That is caritas. We are called to dance and celebrate with people who are joyful and weep with people who are sad, to offer shelter to the homeless and comfort to the broken hearted, to feed the hungry and bring good news to the despairing.

Obviously, individually we can't commit to doing all this all of the time because we wouldn't have any kind of other life as well. But together, we not only can, we do. ALL of that because we're the church. Whenever any one of us takes communion out to those who can't attend worship here, or give food for hungry families or sit by a hospital bed and prays, all of us are there.

Finally, here's a little exercise in caritas that anyone can do any time and it doesn't cost a penny. Imagine it as your caritas app – even if you haven't got an iphone! Next time you're waiting anywhere where you find yourself in a crowd of people – particularly those you don't know, start praying. Pray for each person in the room with you. Pray for them individually, for peace and joy, for the Holy Spirit to be with them, for consolation and relief from fear. Start with the people closest to you (those in your vicinity, your neighbours) and see how far you can get before you have to move on. You might find yourself surprised. It's an easy way to learn how it feels to love God while you're loving your neighbour and being good to your own self too. AMEN

Collect Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: help us so to hear them, to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and for ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

#### Leviticus 19

1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

2 Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

15 You shall not render an unjust judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour. 16 You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbour: I am the Lord.

17 You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.

#### 1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

2 You yourselves know, brothers and sisters,[a] that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. 3 For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. 5 As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; 6 nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, 7 though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. 8 So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

#### Matthew 22: 34-end.

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35 and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' 37 He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: 42 'What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?' They said to him, 'The son of David.' 43 He said to them, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,44 "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'"?

45 If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?' 46 No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.