

Sermon for Easter 6 9th May 2021

We are coming towards the end of the great 50 -day celebration of the Resurrection of Christ –with Ascension day this week, and in two weeks we celebrate Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first disciples.

During this Easter season most of our lectionary readings have been from John’s Gospel and 1st Epistle, and from the Acts of the Apostles.

the central theme today is love - The word appears over 100 times in John’s Gospel and Epistle.

Today’s Gospel reading follows on from the passage we heard last week- and develops the theme of Jesus as the true and living vine- we are the branches – If we abide in him, we will bear much fruit, as, with God’s gift of love, and empowered by his Holy Spirit, we pass on that love to others. ...We achieve nothing in our own strength.

From today’s reading. v 9- As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.

As Ross Thompson says in ‘Spirituality in season’: ‘Through Christ we are brought into the dance of the Trinity’. Our love for others is a natural response to the amazing unconditional love Jesus has for us.

Verse 11- “I have told you this that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete”

This love is the source of deep inner joy, which endures even in times of suffering and loss.

Reflect on the words of Julian of Norwich whose feast day was yesterday : ‘God did not say , You will not be troubled, you will not be belaboured, you will not be disquieted, but he said, You will not be overcome.....always be strong in well-being and in woe... he loves us and delights in us, and so he wishes us to love him and delight in him and trust greatly in him, and all will be well.’

V12-13 This is my commandment , that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”

Unlike the world's rulers who demand obedience to cold objective obligations, Jesus calls us his friends.

God loved us so much that he sent his only son into a hostile world –making him vulnerable to the hatred and jealousy of worldly powers – Jesus sought out the outcasts, he challenged the authorities for trampling on the poor – this led to his rejection and crucifixion. The sin of humankind put him on the Cross, but he kept loving to the end...saying 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'. God vindicated him, raising him up so that all people can be drawn to him in love and share in his life of love and joy.

Some of Jesus's first disciples died for their faith and witness, as have persecuted Christians down the ages since, and continue to do so in parts of the world today.

For us, it may involve setting aside our prejudices that prevent us from working for justice, or from reaching out to those on the margins.

In v16 , Jesus says: You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last,

He chose us – and each of us bring our particular gifts to the table.Prayer, welcoming newcomers, visiting, ministry to children and families, teaching the good news about the kingdom by word and deed.

God loves humanity and the whole of creation, all are welcome, all are valued.

Which brings us to today's reading from Acts 10. The disciples and first believers were all Jews, who continued to study the Torah and worship in the Temple. There were disputes about sharing the good news with Gentiles. When Peter preached at the house of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, he saw Cornelius and his household filled with the Holy Spirit, praising God and speaking in tongues. So Peter knew that it was God's will that they should be baptised.

God's love is for everyone –a lesson not just for the early church but for Christians through centuries of dispute and controversy, and for us today. Whole categories of people barred from God's love through human prejudice and judgment within the church .

Recent controversies being debated in the church of England including accusations of Institutional racism. And discrimination against people because of their gender or sexuality.

Christian communities should proclaim the love of God to all people. God has no favourites. We are all sinners, but we are redeemed sinners.

Our epistle today from 1 John ch 5 – reinforces the Gospel message.

John 1 : 5 v1 : Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

⁵Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Through Jesus, God has chosen us to help to bring in his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. As members of the Body of Christ we are called to go and bear fruit, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

During this time of pandemic we have found new ways to worship and connect with our communities and with the world. At Holy Trinity you have given generously to local and global needs, adapted worship to make it available to those isolating, and donated food and clothing to families in poverty.

As we emerge from lockdown –we may need to discern new ways of engaging with children and families, and of ministering to the lonely and the bereaved.

Remembering the words of Theresa of Avila:

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”