

Jesus is speaking in the face of death. These are things that matter to him. He tells the disciples that if you love me you will be obedient. How will they do that? He will ask that the Spirit is sent to be with them for ever. And what does love mean and look like? If you want to show people that you love Jesus then you will do this by loving others. Not our loud sermons. Not our big gestures but loving. And loving is not known in the one extravagant grand gesture. It is known in clean nappies, and cups of tea and ironing and addictions avoided, money donated and gardening done, and birthdays remembered, and bills paid, and listening and dusting completed and shopping bought and the TV remote handed over and touch and money saved and words expressed and words withheld. There are plenty who use the words of love but whose actions point in a very different direction. We need to avoid being among them. And we will remember particularly in this Christian Aid week that as Christians we are not called to merely love those who love us. –family friends. We are called to love our neighbour- who is my neighbour and he tells the story of the outsider who loves.

Jesus is not saying love is easy. He is saying love for a Christian is love shown in obedience. ‘Those who have my commands and keep them are those who love me’. It is about doing what we say we will do. Here is a question for all of us...once upon a time what did we say we would do and are we fulfilling those responsibilities? Yes in some of those responsibilities it will be done in a different way at this time but that is not the issue. Doing what we said we would do. As I write this the Elders have on their agenda to be looking at what mission looks like for us at this season? How can we be the people that we are when we cannot get into our building? And we cannot gather in a group so how can we fulfil our commitment to each other? But more, how do we share the good news of Jesus at this time.

One of the things that we usually do is provide a place where people can rest and be listened to. It is not small gift. ‘Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable’ Augsburgers . Usually when people come into our building whoever they are we aim to treat them with respect and we invite everyone to worship with us regardless of their back story. How do we show that respect now? Ideas please. Remember the rules though. It is not about what they could do- there is no they we are they. Are we inviting people to journey with us? There are people who are interested in our message like never before. Will we share it? Share it in ways that are true to the people we are.

One of the things we can do is listen as people tell stories of sadness and loss. Or their fear of it. This passage and the passage before it is all about a message to human reality. There is a fear, an over whelming sadness of the loss of someone who has played a large part in their lives. The bereavement of the disciples could well have been like fear. Normal bereavement can be a time when the foundations of life feel like they are shaken. Certainly

for some this is that sort of time. When it feels like everything is upside down. We are bereft of many of those things that we used to manage our lives. We are bereaved people.

We as a church have lost 4 members during this season. Margueritte, Margaret, Cora and Tony. Yes there is sadness but there is also legacy. And one of the dynamics in bereavement is about how we take forward what was good and true from the lives of those we have loved. How can we who know ourselves and the mistakes we make how can we be the inspirers for those who come next. That does not paint these people as plaster saints. They had good points and weaknesses. We need to reflect and learn. For the disciples it was how could they keep on doing what was right without Jesus being around? Jesus then tells them about the Spirit. There is limitless power because of the Spirit. The Spirit is the one who lives in us and is at work through us. We have that presence.

Often Christians wish that they had been around in the time of Jesus so they could have hung about with him and learned from him. That is downplaying the importance of Jesus' limitless power through the Holy Spirit. Once he has died God is no longer confined to the body of Jesus but liberated through the earth. Liberated into our lives.

The Spirit called the Advocate. The Paraclete which means someone called alongside. In the history of the Church whenever the spirit has been given primacy it has been a time when barriers have been broken down. The spirit is always present to bring reconciliation between us and God but also so that we will discern values of justice mercy and peace. The Spirit is beyond barriers of ethnicity, gender, class sexuality. The spirit guides us to places beyond our usual limitations. When during this season something new and joyous comes into your life that is the work of the Spirit.

These are times when we feel our limitations. If we focus all our mental energy on what we do not have that is the path for smallness and a low mood. The disciples could have passed the tissues and spoken together about how great things were once and kept themselves in that locked room. The church would have withered. But they moved beyond their fear. They stepped out. They were obedient in their following the call to love. The same liberty and calling are ours. To love. Who? How do we keep on going? Ah! that is why we need to listen to God and act not through our own strength but through the spirit.

And just in case any of you are this is all a bit airy fairy let me remind you what I said at the beginning of what love looks like -. It is known in clean nappies, and cups of tea and ironing and addictions avoided, money donated and gardening done, and birthdays remembered, and bills paid, and listening and dusting completed and shopping bought and the TV remote handed over and touch and money saved and words expressed and words withheld. Keeping on doing that in the strength of the Spirit.

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