

Rev'd Jean's Sermon – Sunday 15th May 2022

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Readings:

Acts 11: 1-18

John 13: 31-35

NEW!!!! – We are used to seeing this word printed on labels as we shop around the supermarket. All we need to do is to try it and see the “new improved product”. It’s a gimmick, isn’t it? But it catches the eye. What might be different? How might it make things better? What makes the taste so good?

We are going to encounter the word “new” in our Gospel reading today. This encounter is within the setting of the last supper, that might seem a little strange, backing up to the Holy day of Maundy Thursday, when we are now at the fifth Sunday of Easter, twenty-eight days after the Resurrection. But sometimes we have to take a step back to move forwards, and today is for us to hear part of the last supper and its instructions again, to encourage us to prepare for the final ten days of this season and to watch, wait, and listen as we approach the days before the Ascension and the day of Pentecost, the final mysteries of Easter holding out to us the goal of the mission of Jesus Christ’s time on earth, leaving us to continue. That goal is his church. Those of us who seek to put those ideals into place must continually be prepared and ready for changes for new attitudes – new flavours.

We find ourselves around the table, or maybe just watching and hearing in the presence of those gathered there. There is a notable turning point in John’s gospel. Judas has just left the room, out into the darkness to do what he has to do. Bringing betrayal and darkness for those left around the table.

Jesus has shown his disciples a great act of grace and love by washing their feet. Now the supper is over, but things are not completed yet. There is now a sense of urgency as Jesus begins to teach for the last time. He speaks of what now must happen as he prepares to leave them, he speaks of the revelation of God’s glory brought about by what he is about to face and what he has already accomplished, motivated entirely by love. So then he speaks further, the words we have heard many times with our own ears, and listened from the heart, an essential part of being a follower of Jesus is the willingness to love.

Let us then take this in again as we hear Jesus speak to his disciples. “I give you a new commandment: Love one another, such has been my love for all of you.

When I speak to grieving families at a loved one’s funeral and they have listened to Jesus telling them not to be afraid in John 14, I like gently to remind us all of this new commandment about the continuing of love. If they as families and friends are to treasure and put into practice some of the love and things done by their loved one, they are to do it in love. This is how the preciousness of remembering what they did and achieved will be held.

So it is for us now, flowing from that new commandment is the same instruction for us carry on, love one another, is how we will be noticed as the disciples of today.

The disciples were familiar with the commandments, but this different, it is given not as an option, or as a suggestion, when we feel up to it, it is constantly new!! And it is a mandate for our journey in our communities and indeed, I do not need to remind you in our world right now.

The words of Christ, teach a path other than violence, hatred and revenge. Love one another as I have loved you. This is the basic teaching of Christ before he faces the cross. It is a huge challenge isn’t it, and you will agree: easier said than done – that call to imitate that commandment. Conflict and disagreement are part of life, to make efforts to change and how we disagree in love is what will bring glory to God.

Love is one of the most misused words in language, used in advertising to attract the feeling the material things can make a feeling of love and happiness. It’s not about the fuzzy rabbit or the new puppy (although they attract good feelings) it is used by pop stars, holiday adverts, and even chocolate. Love – how does it work?

Love is that which flows from the three persons of the blessed Trinity, it is the creative force which brought about the love which said “yes” to God and brought about the dwelling and existing to the Son becoming flesh and dwelling among us to teach us about ministry and love that is for all.

The question for us post Ascension is to be always alert and ready and to ask ourselves in all situations “how can we in our church, our communities our personal life, how can we bring that label – new”. Newness of God’s love into the presence and situations we find ourselves in, it means we have always to be ready to make decisions that affects others’ wellbeing. This then is most certainly applicable to our times and lives.

We recall that Peter had been at table with them too and despite his times of wobbles and doubt and yes fear, and the humbleness in the way he had to accept that Jesus needed to wash his feet.

We then hear the account of how God’s leading him convinced him that Gentiles too should be admitted to faith. Those who criticize him did not and had not seen what Peter had been shown by God. It’s very applicable to the way nowadays that we receive and process news, isn’t it, coloured by interpretations of all shades of beliefs, and opinions and exaggerated into scaremongering.

Peter then doesn’t step out of the way. He simply gets on board, follows the lead of someone he knows now, and loves and trusts, follows the lead of God and what he has learned, known to him and now put into practice “God’s ways and thoughts are not our ways”, but stare us in the face when least expected. So, he doesn’t get into an argument about circumcision or eating with Gentiles, he just points to God’s ways and work. Of course, as we all know Paul arrived on the scene and endorsed what Peter had put into place which by now had been accepted, we are told the whole community gave thanks for God’s ever widening grace and mercy, that the Gentiles should be accepted into the fellowship of Christ’s church.

We can and indeed it is our mandate to participate in the plans and the process of making all things new. How do we do this? By caring and yes, even loving one another, even in difficult circumstances. Communicating and sharing in ministry by others, noticing that we are one of those disciples. By coming to this table week by week and knowing that we are part of the body of Christ in this place and encouraging others to do the same.

Let us take on the cautionary warning that no one is excluded from the reality of God’s Kingdom, and the creative force of this unconditional love which can bring about the label. This is new! Taste and see that by this many will recognize we are one of those disciples.

Let us pray in this transition period that God’s peace may transpire for the people of our world.

I give you a new commandment – Love one another. This is to be the badge the Christian Community wears before a watching world.