Fifth Sunday of Easter – 18 May 2025

Message – Love one another, even your enemy

Creator, Redeemer, Giver of New Life, draw us into the way of New Life, your perfect love. **Amen.**

> *"this is the [new] covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jeramiah 31:33)*

We are familiar with the legalistic covenant of the Hebrew Scriptures. The laws of that covenant may be thought of as the one the ten and the many: *'I am the Lord your God'*; the ten commandments; and the many commandments that expand on them. Jeremiah was telling Israel that because they had broken the covenant there would be a new one.

Today's reading from the acts of the apostles assures us that we are a part of that new covenant. It is a radically different covenant with just one commandment.

Jesus said, *'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*

It is tempting to think that as our new life can be expressed in so very few words, it should be easy to fathom and to live. A little pause for thought however alerts us to the fact that this is unlikely to be the case. Life is complicated and people are really complicated.

If you can cast your mind back to the experience of studying mathematics at school, it was remarkable how simple rules could lead to such complicated equations and solutions. The same is true of physics. The equations of physics are often surprisingly simple. Applying them is not and sometimes the problems even turn out to be provably unsolvable.

If that is true of maths and physics problems, we cannot reasonably expect solutions as to the appropriate responses to the challenges of life and navigating our communal life to be simply understood or solvable.

In the case of showing love to one another, the obvious challenge is how do we show love to those who do not show love to us, or love to others, even though they too are a part of the body of Christ.

And, for any of us tempted to think well it must just be that they are not really a part of the body of Christ, Jesus also said, *'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.' (Matthew 5.44)* There is no escape, we are called to love those whom we find easy to love and those we do not.

Both the Matthean and Lukan versions of this verse include the instruction to pray for them. In trying to love those whom we cannot stand a good starting point is praying for them. We are not expected to love in our own strength but with the help of the Holy Spirit. The first step to enlisting the help of the Holy Spirit is to have a conversation with God, more commonly referred to as prayer.

Of course, conversations are two-way, so it is not just

about us expressing the seeming impossibility of our loving the other person but also our seeking God's perspective on the other person, of trying to see them through God's eyes, and in turn trying to see through their eyes.

We also need to consider the meaning of love. We use the word love to translate a lot of different Greek words, up to a dozen different words in some translations. So, what is it we are talking about in our calling to love one another and to love even our enemy. It is the love God has for us that we are being asked to have for others.

We are not talking about an emotion. We are talking about an attitude of heart and mind. The most familiar description is that of Chapter thirteen of Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians. It only recently dawned on me that we could use this passage as an examen of our attitude to others.

It is often read at weddings; we could use it to look at our relationship with our partner and in that context, it could be used together, inviting the other to say both the ways in which we do and do not reflect all of the qualities that Saint Paul describes as a part of love.

However, we could also use it as an examen of our relationship with those we can't stand. Asking whether we reflect the qualities listed towards those people too.

The first part of the passage lists the things we should not be. Today, we might add a few more items to the things that are prioritised but which are nothing without love. In our society we might add success and fame; some who have

success or fame do show a deep love for others; some most certainly do not. Saint Paul's description of love sets a new benchmark, the lens through which God sees us. Love is all that matters.

The description of love itself is surprisingly short. Despite this brevity it is confronting when we consider our response to those whom we struggle to love, or can't stand, in its light. *'love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.'* Few of us would feel our love for those we do love, never mind those we struggle to love, measures up well to God's love, which is all these things.

The final part of Saint Paul's description reflects on the lasting nature of love. Acts of love have a lasting effect. The lives of saints are remembered long after the lives of many of their contemporaries. Love has an enduring quality.

It is true that the lives of those who have excelled in their hatred of others are also remembered. Yet, few of us would want to be remembered for such a reason and for most people, such hatred does not bring fullness of life. For most of us such hated makes them our enemies, raising the question of how we are supposed to show them love.

While Saint Paul offers us a description of love, Christ offers us an example of love. In the life of Christ, we see love in action towards both friends and enemies.

It is easier far to relate to the love of friends but how do we respond to our enemies. As far as is possible we maintain the stance of invincible and unending goodwill

towards them Saint Paul describes. We continue to show compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, we continue to always be ready to forgive (Colossians 3:12-13).

This does not turn us into holy door mats. As we read of the life of Christ, we find someone who was willing to stand up for those whom others oppressed. The oppressors were not impressed. We may anticipate a similar response.

Excepting the clearing of the temple, Christ did not physically attack those whom we might see as his enemies, but he most definitely spoke out against their actions and priorities. Where we see people oppressing others, we too should speak out against their actions and priorities, we should do all we can to prevent their abuses of others.

We must also be mindful of the log in our own eyes and recognise that sometimes we are the ones who are unintentionally harming others. This is where humility and meekness are essential. We need always to be ready to learn from the perspective of others and how they experience our actions and priorities.

Loving others, both those we find easy to love and those we find hard to love, does not mean accepting all that they do. Indeed, true love is always prepared to speak the truth, never with malice or ill intent but with gentleness, compassion and encouragement, building up the other.

In all our diversity, may we show such love to one another, to those we find easy to love and to those we struggle to love, that the love of God may always be seen in us.