

Easter 6 9th May 2021 John 15: 9-17 Love one another

I watched a bean seedling bending towards the light recently. Amazing in just one hour to see the influence of light turning the tip through 90 degrees while I watched. Jesus is light and love in our lives and bit by bit that changes a lot in life. We're influenced by that love in our lives to change, to move along, to move towards God.

In our gospel reading today we're back to what we call holy week, Jesus has entered Jerusalem and is preparing to depart soon. The disciples have no idea how soon, and he has a lot to say to his followers in that week before he dies. Jesus loves them and will demonstrate that to them in a very tangible way in his death, yet to be seen by them.

He leaves them with many words of hope before he goes to be with God, his father in heaven, where he also prepares a place for us.

At this stage they don't realise he'll be crucified and die a horrible death out of love for all - even though he's given them clues on the way. They've yet to catch on to the fact that he'll rise again or even ascend to heaven.

We live in days when we know what happened - we know the story, we've followed the events through to Easter and here Jesus talks to his followers as **friends**: he tells them: '**You are my friends**'.

So what's the big deal?

Those who followed a teacher were usually servants so this is a clear move away from being told what to do as servants - now they're alongside Jesus as friends and that friendship will come to full fruition when they know he's given up his life for them.

Those who love Jesus and follow his way - he calls **friends** and he has chosen them to pass on his message of good news.

What does it mean to be a friend?

Maybe you've questioned that in life or even in the pandemic.

I've recently been on a Zoom with friends from years ago.

What does it mean to be a friend? To keep in touch, to renew old bonds, be there for each other.

Here Jesus made a profound and far-reaching commandment to his friends *he tells them* - they are **to love one another** - with that next part '**as I have loved you**' - and as followers - that means us too.

And still that challenge is there for us in today's world as Jesus says. '**love one another**'.

'Take my example and live it out where you are, in your time and for time to come.' Says Jesus. Be influenced by Jesus to change.

The amazing thing is the impact this has had for 2000 plus years.

So how do we show love to others? We know the words, we've heard them many times before - what's new for today?

That comes down to you and I and our love for Jesus, working that out in our daily lives- looking to find what we need to do to show that love to others, especially those who are hard to love: As a young person said recently 'that's the hard bit' we all know the nagging challenge to love the unlovely and the unlovable.

How do we do that? We do it with God's help, God's love and grace within us. As we pray each day and take those difficult situations to Jesus we're influenced by his words and in the light of his life, death and rising again, we follow his example and command.

So how do others show this love?

A recent report in the Church of England (Church Urban fund) looked at how churches have supported people in the pandemic. There are such encouraging stories. Many churches have upped their game providing additional supportive services, closing some things down out of necessity and starting other events online or to help in more practical ways - there are some we know of locally.

The challenge is out there and we rise to it in different ways .

So how do we continue to rise to this command of Jesus to love each other? Many of us are still limiting the way we live, but there's a time to think about others and how they need help and support as we emerge.

We may be thinking ahead to holidays and time to visit much-loved family and friends.

Have we raided the piggy bank lately to check if we've been able to save enough? For those struggling I pray you can find a break somewhere this year. For those who've been able to save - there's several ways to help others. Vaccinations have already helped us in the UK, but other parts of the world where infection is rife, do not yet get a fair share and until they do, the situation will be slow to resolve. Gifts are vital to allow others to be protected and helped along too.

You may recall the words that when one suffers, we all suffer, so true when it comes to the pandemic, as well as for our church family and our own families, where there is sorrow and suffering among us at this time.

Love supports, cares and listens too.

What does Jesus say to us? 'You are my friends' and we're called to love one another as he loves us. It follows, and as followers, we're to follow that command, be there to listen and support each other and to give in other ways - as I know many are doing, and in that way, we're helping and loving as Jesus commands us - not forgetting that there's also a time to accept that love, to receive that love as we seek to love one another, in the words of Jesus 'as I have loved you'. Amen