



## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

### The Great Command & Commission

Greetings my brothers & sisters in Christ, what a joy that we can come together to worship, as we all continue our life journey, celebrating not only the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter, but also the new commandment Jesus gave us, to love one another.

For those watching via live stream, unable to be here today, and we continue to pray that, we will be restored to normal daily lives, that we will be able to once again come together each Sunday for worship and fellowship.

I pray, that today's message will lift all our spirits, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

*Let us pray.*

*Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.*

*Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings. Amen.*

I just love the way, the Holy Spirit, in His perfect timing, challenges our apathy and complacency, which we sometimes allow ourselves to "sink into"! I give myself as example me!

As I prepared today's message over the past few weeks, and the reading of many commentaries/reflections, I wondered, do we / I tend to take it for granted that Jesus told us to love one another, without bothering about the occasion on which He did this?

I know I did, with all the excuses one could come up with, over certain circumstances, fall into the trap of *conditional love*, from a complete disregard of our Gospel reading states, and that is, *Christ's love is not exclusive, nor depending on a situation or environment.*

Today's first reading today reinforces this unconditional love, from the last few verses, when St Peter says:

*<sup>16</sup>And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." <sup>17</sup>If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?' <sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, 'Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.'*

I also must say it came as a "bit of an ouch moment", to realize that the setting of this command in our Gospel reading today, when, Jesus spoke these words of a new commandment, was immediately after Judas had left the upper room to go and betray Him to his enemies.

Jesus was not only aware of what Judas was going to do, but spoke of its consequences as His glorification. **The command to love is without limit.**

Like the love of Jesus himself ('just as I have loved you') it is to include everyone, yes even Judas. This was the new commandment Jesus had come to bring and the sign by which the world would recognize his followers.

Today's Gospel reading comes at the turning point of the Last Supper.

Judas has just left the room, and there is now no going back.

The supper is over, and Jesus begins to talk, to explain, as though trying to make the disciples understand at last, to impress upon them some of the things that they should already know.

But whenever one of the disciples does speak in the verses that follow today's reading, it is only to demonstrate how puzzled they are, and how little they understand, even at this late hour.

### ***Are we no different?***

The two themes of today's reading from John are related, and a characteristic of all of John's writing. Firstly, now that Judas has gone about his business, and the cross is inescapable, Jesus speaks of glorification. In all of John's writing, the cross is the moment of illumination, when God is to be seen in Christ, and Christ is to be seen in God. Secondly, Jesus talks about love, the new commandment that he gives to his disciples. The themes are connected because what is revealed in the cross, is the love of God in Christ. In the cross we see that love is the whole nature of God in his dealings with us. The commandment to love is not exactly new. Most of the Old Testament law is designed to make Israel a loving community that will treat its members and those who come in contact with it with justice and care.

But here in John's Gospel the connection is made explicit and unavoidable.

Just as Jesus shows us the nature of God, so we are called to show others that same nature. Just as Israel was designed to be a community that showed the nature of its God, so Jesus' followers are called to be a community from which the love of God, God's very nature, shines out!

So, what is this new love that we are called to receive and transmit?

It is, the love that Jesus has shown to us, his followers.

We are to reflect back what we have received and, in doing that, we will be reflecting the God whom we believe in. We will be restoring his image in ourselves, by making ourselves like the Son. We are created in God's image, and now we are to be restored in that image again, by showing the love of the Father and the Son. This great "new commandment" can fill us with a great sense of hopelessness and failure, if we do not read John's Gospel carefully.

We know that we are wholly incapable of showing the love of God, but this commandment is given to the disciples who don't seem to understand a word Jesus is saying, and who are very shortly going to betray him. Jesus' love for his disciples is utterly realistic. He knows the kind of people he has chosen, then and now. They are, we are ordinary, and fallible. To these people, that's us, Jesus entrusted and continues to entrust himself and his message. They / we are worthy because they / we are loved. That is the Christian disciples only qualification for the great task we are given.

Peter, too, has learned enough about God to recognise the signs of His presence, however unlikely and unpredicted. And so he becomes the means whereby God's salvation comes to Cornelius and his household.

Knowing that we are loved and trusted by God, is the beginning of fulfilling this commandment.

We do not have to generate this love ourselves, because it is given to us.

Christians, are fundamentally people who know that God is love, and we know it, not because we are better at loving than anyone else, but because we know that God has loved us and trusted us, even before we were either lovely or trustworthy. ***Amen***