

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October; Last day of Trinity; Family Benefice Eucharist, Ampleforth.

Today we heard about Jesus being asked by the teachers of the Law, what is the greatest commandment, and He answered by saying to love God and others as we are loved.

Interestingly, Jesus says that loving God first and then our neighbour is a command. We do not think of love as a command, we think of love as something we either feel or we do not feel, we choose to give, or we don't. We say that we love certain cars, clothes, sports teams, when we simply like them. They are important to us, so we use the term love when we speak of them. You might hear a person say, "I love Manchester United - that is my team." The person saying that probably doesn't know a single person involved in the team personally, yet he will use the word 'love' when speaking of the team. Actually, he just likes them, looks up to them, hopes for them to win when they play. Indeed sport also has a way of touching people in a collective way and creates almost a spiritual fervour and togetherness depending on who you support of course! But, we do tend mix up the word love and like all the time. I might say 'I love chips', but actually, I mean I just like them. Someone else may hate chips. In fact, we may love chips one day and hate them the next day - especially when we get on the scales after eating quite a lot of them. We say we love a game, good food, television programmes and other things but then we leave those things behind us as time passes.

We also think of love as an emotion which depends on how we feel. We may feel a certain way on Monday and then feel another way by Tuesday of the same week. That makes expressing human love a very unpredictable and uncertain thing. Thankfully most of the time we do feel loved, by our parents, husbands and wives, partners, children, and friends but often people are hurt when they have been told they are loved and then something happens, or is said, which denies it, and someone ends up broken-

hearted and alone, even for the rest of their lives. Our emotions tend to run upward and downward, left and right, backward, and forward. We are on fire one day and then grow cold toward something or someone the next. We yearn to be loved and to love. It is what makes us human. Much of our music, poetry, art, and literature speak of this subject, but it seems we struggle to get there because human love is always fragile.

With God though it is very different. With Him to love is the essential and only thing. That is because love is God's nature. His love creates and drives every atom in the universe! With Him there are no broken hearts, nor pain nor loneliness, only everlasting friendship and all things are made new.. I am now going to give you a quick lesson in Hebrew, the language the Bible was originally written in. In Hebrew, the word for God's love is '*Hesed*'. In Hebrew a lot of words are an action rather than a feeling and *Hesed* is hard to translate into English because there are many English words we can use, such as 'loving kindness', 'unconditional', 'unchanging', 'steadfast'. All these are attempts to describe that He loves because He is love, which is very different to how we understand love as people, because for us it is an emotion that can change very quickly.

That is why today Jesus says to love God and each other is not an emotion, it is a command to act and so for us to love the way God loves requires His help but when we accept His love, God puts His love in us by His Holy Spirit, so that we can love as He loves and live and act as He desires us to.

Loving God also means that we obey Him with a spirit of joy and readiness, with all our, heart, body, and soul not begrudging what He asks us to do. We are meant to love others, not because they deserve it or meet our approval, but because we are first loved by God, and we count it a joy to love each other.

We know God loves the whole world but be assured that Jesus is talking about something else here, he is talking about that word *Hesed*. He is saying that God never changes and loves us beyond our imagining because that is who He is and so loving as we should, loving God first, means we all will have a closer walk with Him by knowing the one who knows us even better than we know ourselves. The more we love Him, the more we will experience Him, and the more we will give His love to others.

Jesus says to us all today, love strong, because you were first loved and without love we all perish. The earth and the stars will pass away, but love will always remain. Thanks be to God. Amen.