

St Hilda's Sunday Message – "Love One Another" – 30 April 2017

Soon after I was ordained in 1980 I heard reports of a gathering of clergy in ChCh Cathedral. While I had been ordained in ChCh Cathedral and was a curate in Ashburton, I was not there on that occasion. But I noticed that the reports soon after were varied and emotive. The Right Revd Joshua Chiu Ban It (1966-1982) had addressed the gathering as the preacher that day. He stood up to preach on this very formal occasion and all ears and eyes were towards this Singaporean Archbishop. His message was simply this, "Love One Another." Having uttered these three words he sat down and the sermon was ended. I do not remember reports of how the ChCh Bp Allan Pyatt or the Dean Michael Underhill responded on this occasion. But the clergy reports I heard were either, "This was just what we needed" or, "How insulting and trite that the Asian Bishop should offend us like this."

I think the bishop made his point very well: his message was succinct, to the point, unmistakably clear, biblical, offensive to some, just like Jesus' preaching had been; and memorable – here am I nearly 40 years later telling you about it.

I said Biblical. The passage we heard today from 1Peter 1:22b says,

"have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply (or constantly) from the heart."

More than that epistles 1 Peter and 1 John and John's gospel each make this statement or something close to it several times. The apostle John of course conceived of himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. He seemed to have really got it; that core to Jesus' mission was the call to love. The Christian and the Church who loves deeply will always have an advantage in winning people for Christ and maintaining unity in the Spirit.

I think of the popular chorus when I first became a Christian in the mid 1970's,

"They will know we are Christians by our love,
By our love, by our love,
They will know we are Christians by our love."

Where Christian love reigns people are built up. Like the funeral director I talked to this week. Her manner was so affirming that I simply said to her, "You make a good director with such a positive manner." With almost a tear in her eye she said, "Last night we celebrated the fact that I have been with the firm now for three months and they are going to keep me on." Little did I know that was her situation, but the timelessness of my casual remark seemed to be a great affirmation for her.

Loving another is doing something that is affirming and positive.

Conversely where love is absent people can become deeply disillusioned, especially if the love-less-ness is expressed by a Christian.

In two other of my pastoral conversations this week I have become aware how lack of Christian love has deeply disturbed two people, members of this church. And, sadly, the lack

of love (intentionally or otherwise) came from members of this church. These people made to feel unwelcome. One because someone was seemingly prejudiced because a person was different and presumably they somehow felt threatened by this. The other because they did not attend as often as the loveless one judged sufficient, and this resulted in communication being cut when in fact their lack of response did not mean lack of interest.

Sisters and brothers, love begins at home. Love is maintained when we keep our eyes on Jesus and act as he acts.

Today, we have heard again the Emmaus Road story. Let us imagine for a moment if Jesus had got cheesed off because Cleopas and his mate, despite all they had learned about Jesus' plans, were deemed to be meatheads by Jesus. So, He left them to their ignorance and turned away rather than listening to their story and breaking bread with them so that, "their eyes were opened."

Or if Jesus was so pissed off with Peter that he refused to lovingly dialogue with him post resurrection about feeding lambs and sheep three times, thus assuring him of forgiveness. Imagine his absence in the Acts story, beginning with his not offering the Pentecost Sunday message. Or not having his epistles, including the one we read from today.

Jesus, the King of Love, knows and understands that we are human. In aligning ourselves with Him, we become exiles as the epistle today began by saying,

"... live in reverent fear during the time of your exile." Peter 1:17b

An exile is always very aware of the need for God's protection and the importance of community for sustenance, often for the most basic things. In their estrangement from the world about them, they are sustained by God's love and the love of fellow exiles. In our case the Christian community of which we are apart. A healthy and a strong church takes very seriously its responsibility to its members; to care for, sometimes provide for, always to love them even sacrificially.

Our readings today, beginning with the Acts 2 passage urge us the baptised, knowing whose we are, to overcome the corruptness of the world and to be Spirit-filled exiles who love one another and who rejoice that the Lord Jesus walks with them, opening our eyes to His presence and to his loving action.

I believe ABp Chiu Ban It in the early 1980's got it very right when he urged the church in Christchurch, beginning with the clergy, to love one another. I am only sorry that I didn't have the courage to do what he did then and preach a three word sermon before sitting down.

So, may I summarise what I am trying to say today,

"Love One Another"

Rev'd Terry Alve

Acts 2:14a, 36-41 (NRSVA)

Peter Addresses the Crowd

^{14a} But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them:

³⁶ Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah,^[h] this Jesus whom you crucified.’

The First Converts

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers,^[i] what should we do?’ ³⁸ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.’ ⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ ⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Footnotes:

- h. [Acts 2:36](#) Or *Christ*
- i. [Acts 2:37](#) Gk *Men, brothers*

1 Peter 1:17-23 (NRSVA)

¹⁷ If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear **during the time of your exile.** ¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹ Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

²² Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth^[a] so that you **have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply^[b] from the heart.**^[c] ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.^[d]

Footnotes:

- a. [1 Peter 1:22](#) Other ancient authorities add *through the Spirit*
- b. [1 Peter 1:22](#) Or *constantly*
- c. [1 Peter 1:22](#) Other ancient authorities read *a pure heart*
- d. [1 Peter 1:23](#) Or *through the word of the living and enduring God*

Luke 24:13-35 (NRSVA)

The Walk to Emmaus

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad.^[b] ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ ¹⁹ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth,^[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.^[d] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’ ²⁵ Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us^[f] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Footnotes:

- a. [Luke 24:13](#) Gk *sixty stadia*; other ancient authorities read *a hundred and sixty stadia*
- b. [Luke 24:17](#) Other ancient authorities read *walk along, looking sad?*
- c. [Luke 24:19](#) Other ancient authorities read *Jesus the Nazorean*
- d. [Luke 24:21](#) Or *to set Israel free*
- e. [Luke 24:26](#) Or *the Christ*
- f. [Luke 24:32](#) Other ancient authorities lack *within us*