

Easter 5

May I speak with the love and grace of the living God. Amen.

I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

With these words Jesus prepares his disciples for a time, when he will no longer physically be with them. Love one another, as I have loved you. Sounds lovely and nice, doesn't it? But what does it mean to love one another?

I think when we get into the nitty gritty stuff of what it means to love one another, we might find this concept not quite so lovely and nice anymore. The theory of it is one thing, but the reality is another thing entirely. The disciples were people like us, people with strengths and weaknesses, people that could inspire and disappoint, people with good days and bad days. People who sometimes found just the right words in a difficult situation and sometimes they would say things that would hurt or start a fight. The disciples were human, like we are. It is easy to love the idea of people, the idea of people who are nice and lovely. It is an entirely different thing to love people, who leave behind a mess, are annoying for all sorts of reasons and occasionally say things that enrage or hurt us.

I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another.

A lovely and nice concept until we take into consideration how challenging it can be at times to love the people in our lives. Is it even possible to love one another as Jesus asks the disciples and asks us to do?

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

Jesus loved the disciples, loved us, first, setting an example of what it means to love. Jesus loved the disciples, loves us, not only when all is well, when we are easy to love. Jesus also loves us, when we mess up, when we are at our worst and least pleasant, as the story of Peter shows, which we talked about a couple weeks ago. Peter, at his worst, denied Jesus three times when Jesus was facing trials and an unjust execution, yet the resurrected Jesus affirmed Peter's calling and his love for him three times. This is how Jesus loves us, not just when it is easy, when we are nice and easy to get along with. Jesus even loves us through disappointments and through the times when we are at our worst.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

This kind of love makes room for us, just the way we are. We do not first have to become a certain way to belong with Jesus, with God, we are welcome, we are loved just the way we are. A love that does not fade and that cannot be destroyed. God does not love us because we have proven worthy of it, because we fulfil some minimum requirements. No. God's love for us is unconditional, unchanging and forever. Because this love is not simply a feeling, that can easily change day by

day. The love God has for us is a love God chose. God chose to love us, no matter what and never changing.

I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another.

Jesus calls us as the church, as followers of Christ, to love one another. And yes, that might sometimes be rather challenging as we encounter one another in our messiness, on some bad days and in moments when we simply get on each other's nerves. It might also be challenging, as we come together from different walks of life, from different cultures and bringing with us different stories that sometimes can make it hard for us to understand one another. Like I said loving one another can sound like a lovely and nice concept, but it is actually a great challenge.

Following Jesus' commandment requires a choice from us, over and over again. The choice to love people, to speak kindly with and of them, even when it is hard. The choice to love each other, to reach out to help and care, even when we feel the other might not deserve it. The choice to love each other with all our differences of walks of life, cultures and stories, not trying to make others act, speak and worship and live their faith like us, but to choose to make space for our different gifts and experiences. Choosing to listen and try and understand, choosing to learn about and from the other, looking out for glimpses of God's beauty and glory in the other.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

Over and over Jesus asks us to make that choice again, the choice to love one another, because by this love will everyone know, that we are his followers. Today we have Lyran and Caspian with us, who will be baptised in a few moments. Today all of you here are asked to choose and welcome them into God's family, asked to choose to love them. Both in moments when they are incredibly cute and loveable, as well as in moments when they are not at their best. Are we willing to choose to love Caspian and Lyran, to love each other and all God might bring to be part of the St Margaret's community?

**I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.**

Amen.