



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday, 15 May 2022 – Easter 5
Readings: Acts of the Apostles 11: 1-18 and St John 13: 31-35
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Learning though the eyes of a child

When we were little children encountering things for the first time, we wanted to know what they were, how they worked and would reach out to touch them. Parental teaching was necessarily swift, as we reached up for the pan on the hob, telling us “Don’t touch that!” Or, perhaps in church when the sermon was dragging on, bored we’d start swinging out feet kicking the pew in front earning the comment “Don’t do that!” Our reaction, to those ‘don’ts’ was invariably “Why?” The Ten Commandments have that similar control, “Thou shalt not” and the child in us wants to rebel. Jesus, as ever, takes a different tactic and never misses an opportunity to teach his disciples. Lovingly, calling them “little children”, he says, “I give you a new commandment. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another.” Not multiple don’ts but rather, a single do! In that sentence the entire gospel is encapsulated. To understand it better, however, we need to think about what kind of love this is.

Learning to discern

When we don’t understand something, we might say the phrase “It’s all Greek to me!” Well, happily, Greek can help teach us about Christ’s love. The Greeks have nine words for love, some positive, some negative. It won’t take long to trot through them, so here goes:

- **Eros:** sexual desire;
- **Philia:** soul-mates who share similar values;
- **Storgé:** blood-ties within a family;
- **Pragma:** mature love of long-term relationships;
- **Ludus:** carefree, short-term relationships;
- **Mania:** unhealthy obsession of things or people;
- **Meraki:** Creativeness e.g., painting and music;
- **Philantia:** narcissistic self-love.

We may have experienced these positive forms or been a victim of the negative kind. If you were counting, you’ll know I’ve only reached number 8, so what is number 9? It’s **Agapé**. The kind of love Christ is asking us to put into practice in our church community and in daily living.

The light bulb moment!

The easiest way to understand this love is to have an illustration of what this love is not. We see this in Acts. Peter and six others do exactly as Jesus had

commissioned, "... to go and make disciples of all nations". Strategically, they visit two ports, Joppa and Caesarea, ideal places for their teaching to reach the gathering traders and seamen who could spread the message they heard along the coast and even overseas. But, at the start of the reading we heard Peter come in for some scorching criticism from the Christians in Jerusalem. Imagine ourselves there, "Do you mean to say, you preached the word of God to some Gentiles and they accepted it but you didn't require them to be circumcised! Why?" While Peter explained, his hearers' minds must have turned cartwheels thinking, "So, let's get this straight, in Peter's heavenly vision he was told that it's ok to eat all kinds of animals even pigs and reptiles!" Thankfully, they listened attentively and at the end, learning that the people had received the Holy Spirit they declared, "Then God has given **even** to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to eternal life!" The penny would also have dropped that to be true to Christ, they would need to love the Gentiles unconditionally, accepting them, their culture and their way of exercising their faith, because God, out of his love, considered them his children too.

Putting love into practice

We all know people whose personalities or values do not click with ours. There's nothing morally wrong with them but they get under our skin and we fume quietly or, hotly, as the case may be. What Jesus has commanded us to do, is a big 'Ask'. How, though, do we get alongside all sorts and conditions of people, learning with them for mutual benefit to love them enough to remove the friction? One phrase of Jesus that comes to mind is, "If they do not receive you, let your peace return to you." When we have peace in our hearts, we can be objective learning new ways of finding accord and loving people even if we don't like their mannerisms. In that way we begin to perceive the peace of God, which passes all understanding. Christ showed that every day of his earthly life as he got alongside people, like those Jews accosting him as he walked through Solomon's Portico in the temple. For us, similar to children learning good habits, learning to love is daily work in progress. With peace in our hearts, we are more likely to look, to learn and to love.

Amen.