

6th Sunday of Easter 2020 (Year A) – John 14:15-21 “If you love me.....?”

“If you love me”

The opening words of today’s gospel reading just 4 words – and yet 4 words which hold such enormous importance and consequence in all of our lives..... Especially when the one who speaks them is someone we love.... and someone we know loves us.....

Because we all want to be loved.....

Love is the essence of who we are – because God is love and when we read that He created us in His image it means that we were created in His love..... love is what we were created in, and what we were created for.....

Love influences and effects our actions, attitudes and thinking..... and demonstrations of love - particularly from those that we care for – are something we all look for, and need

“If you love me” are words I know I have spoken or thought at different times in my life though unfortunately, unlike Jesus, I will have uttered those words with an underlying selfish and self-centred interest A result of my imperfect humanity and natural insecurities.....

So, when *we* speak these words, what are we expecting, hoping, demanding....

At this point, being someone who tries to illustrate my talks with the help of a visual image, my mind immediately recalled the old Milk Tray advert..... If you're not too young (!) you may remember the series of adverts in which we witness this very handsome and athletic man dressed in black, who seems to have no limits to what he will do to bring the lady he loves her favourite box of chocolates. We would see him jump off clifftops into the sea, and then be chased by sharks, or ski across treacherous terrain, "all" as the punch line reminded us at the end, "because the lady loved Milk Tray"

Interestingly there is a book written by Gary Chapman called "The 5 Love Languages" – in which he describes 5 different ways in which we communicate love, and depending on our personalities, we will prefer using or receiving one more than another. One of those languages is *receiving gifts* (obviously important for the lady who loves her chocolate in the advert!) But the other languages are: quality time, words of affirmation, acts of service, and physical touch.

Therefore when *we* utter the words "if you love me....." Gary Chapman would suggest that we will be seeking at least one of these 5 actions, these 5 languages, to be demonstrated as confirmation of another's love....

However, returning to our gospel reading, these 4 words *aren't* ours.. they don't come from our lips.... "*if you love me*" are the words spoken by Jesus..... And as such, they suddenly have even greater importance and consequence to our lives.

Because when Jesus speaks these words they *do not* come from a place of selfish need for Himself, but from a place, a heart, of unconditional and selfless love a sacrificial love which He has demonstrated in the most emphatic way.....

I believe that when Jesus speaks these 4 words, they come from His desire to draw each one of us closer to Him, into His love, and into a better way of life and being.....into a relationship with the God of love - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - who has always wanted to enfold us all in His perfect love, so that His creation is one with Him – *the God who loves us more than we will ever fully comprehend.*

I think the apostle John got very close to understanding what that love looks like.....although he describes himself as the disciple Jesus loved I don't think it is because he thought himself the favourite, but because he truly experienced Jesus's love which is why John's gospel is very different to the other three. He doesn't concentrate on chronologically recording Jesus's teachings and parables like Matthew, Mark and Luke, but looks at the bigger picture, the theme of love – of loving God, receiving His love, loving others, and abiding in that love that is embodied in the Trinity.

So what does loving Jesus look like for us?

“if you love me”.... Jesus says, “you will keep my commandments”

Of which, in John’s gospel, there is in fact only one, that He tells them of in the previous chapter (13:34) the ‘new’ commandment “to love one another as I have loved you”

Indeed, throughout his gospel John records how Jesus demonstrates what that love looks like..... It is a love of peace, of justice, of healing, of selflessness, of kindness, of generosity, of equality, of forgiveness, of humility..... it is a love that emphasises relationship and unity, perfectly evidenced in the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... and it is a love that we are all called into.....

Before I finish I would just like to return again to the Milk Tray advert? To the noticeably fit and able hero who effortlessly performed all those heroic feats in order to bring to the lady he loved the chocolates he knew she liked Because what if there had been a previous advert where our hero is seen to be afraid of heights and unable to swim? Although he had the desire to bring these chocolates to the one he loved, the obstacle of mountains and sea were impossible for him....? Until that is someone comes and teaches him to swim, and helps him overcome his fear of heights.....

Because I am reminded of St Paul's letter to the Romans in which he bemoans the fact that what he wants to do he doesn't seem to be able to do, and what he doesn't want to do he finds himself doing.....(7:15-25)

For indeed, it isn't always easy trying to do what we know we should, what we know Jesus asks us to, what we know He has shown us and told us to

Forgiving someone... putting others needs before our own....

But thank goodness, we don't have to do try on our own - we have the help, as Jesus tells us, of the Holy Spirit... who will be with us, living in us, abiding in us.....

And so today I'm not speaking directly into the C-19 situation we find ourselves in.....because this situation will change..... but I'm speaking into our life situation.... Because God's love for us will never change, *and His love can change everything*.....

Today Jesus says to us all:

"if you love me let me show you what love really is..... let me draw you into the One who is love – join us in that relationship of pure love, of Oneness that we have as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.....

Let the Holy Spirit help you to do what you saw me do....

forgiving, caring, serving, healing, seeking justice and peace.....

And remember, the Father has made us all in His love, and so when you look at others, see me, because all have been made with my love in them.....

Let my love change you and transform you, let my love bring you peace and fullness of life..... and let it transform others, as you in turn love them..... so that through my love we can change the world *AMEN*