

## **Jesus, and a New Commandment...**

**22/4/18**

**I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.**

**Amen.**

What does it really mean to love one another?

Life is not easy.

We are surrounded by so many demands on a daily basis, at home, in our relationships, from the society that we operate in, financially, as well as from work. There is pressure on us everywhere we turn, yet, we are reminded in today's Gospel reading how Jesus laid down his life for us so that we might be saved and reunited with our Father.

Alvin Toffler, in his book, Future Shock, written towards the end of the last century, suggested that the only factor we can be sure of is change. There has been so much change over the last twenty years... rapid technological change that has been wonderful in some aspects but also detrimental in others. Let us take the smart phone for example. A brilliant piece of technology that is more powerful than the technology used to put man on the moon in the 1960's. Yet, as a result of this outstanding piece of technology we now find ourselves permanently connected to others and our workplace on a 24/7 basis. The result? We never switch off. Our stress levels rise and we have less love for one another.

Some might argue that the New Commandment as given by Jesus to love one another as I have loved you is a little more challenging to follow in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, compared to when Jesus lived.

Is this true?

I have spent some time over the last few weeks watching an outstanding series on television that denotes the historical Jesus and His life. I became immersed in the world that Jesus grew up and lived in. Jesus also had a challenging time. He found Himself born into a world where the Roman Empire had colonised

His country. He was surrounded by fundamentalists who were insistent that every letter of the Jewish law be followed. He lived in times of uncertainty and tension. Furthermore, as He grew, Jesus knew it was His mission to stand up to the Jewish authorities and preach a new word, full of love, forgiveness and hope. Eventually the Jewish authorities felt threatened and they ensured that Jesus was made known to the Roman authorities... the rest is history.

My point this morning is that I would like to take a moment and unpack the challenge of loving one another. This is the greatest commandment that Jesus has left us. This commandment goes hand in hand with the act of Jesus laying down His life for us. They cannot be separated. Jesus died for us and out of this act of love; Jesus calls us to love one another, as I have loved you.

We also live in challenging times. We live in a world that no longer necessarily loves Jesus and His message for the world. We live in a world of a myriad different religions and cultures, yet we are called to love one another. We live in a world that is globally connected, diverse, consumer based and worldly. It is in this world that we are called to operate as Christians.

Jesus set a high standard for us in terms of who we love and how we love... these examples are told to us in the Gospel in terms of how Jesus relates to people, people from all walks of life...

If we are to truly love one another, then we need to love everyone, no matter if:

They are black, white, coloured, pink or green

They are pan, trans, bi, homo or heterosexual

They are large, small or average in body build

They are English, Afrikaans, Zulu or any other language or culture that you can think of

They are rich, poor or of average wealth

They are Christian, Buddhist, pagan or of any other faith

They are broken, successful, scared, hurting, loud or quiet

They are politically liberal or conservative

The bottom line is we are called to love one another.

Jesus laid down His life for us.

This was His eternal gift to us and humankind.

Our gift in return, to both Him and one another, is to share His love with the world, no matter the cost to us.

This may seem a tall order...

But

As Christians we have some tricks up our sleeves:

We are able to support one another

We are able to be filled with the Holy Spirit who assists us in our journey

We have worship to inspire us

We have faith to sustain us

We have the love of Jesus to motivate us

We are also called as Christians to discover our gifts and to use them to His glory. By discovering our gifts and using them in His name, we are showing Jesus both thanks and glory, while we spread the Good News. Your gift may be leading worship, raising funds, service, ministry, social outreach or whatever you feel the Lord has gifted you with. Part of loving one another is using these gifts to both lift one another up and simultaneously build His church. Jesus died for us so that we might have the freedom to discover and use the gifts we were born with. Use your gift for the building of His kingdom.

Jesus died for us that we might have a new life, a life filled with hope, love, forgiveness and faith.

However, it needs to be said, and I am the first person to acknowledge this, none of our lives are perfect. We all struggle. We all take strain. We all have our cross to bear, be it ill health, mental or physical, financial stress, loneliness, broken relationships, unemployment and the like. In many ways we remain a

broken people struggling with the realities of daily life in a world that can at times be dark and threatening. One of the greatest challenges that I have found in my personal life and ministry, and I have mentioned this before, is the skill of maintaining my ministry in the church even when I am struggling with my own ups and downs in life. Part of my calling is to be always present, always available and always hopeful, even when my sock is sliding down inside my shoe but stole is perfectly straight...

Jesus knew what it was like to struggle in life. He faced uncertainty, betrayal, lies, loneliness and death. Yet, through all of this He triumphed and fulfilled His calling. We, as Christians are called to do the same. Jesus is the light during our time of darkness. Let us continually be that light to one another in this world.

My hope and prayers for you this Easter is twofold:

Firstly, I pray that you may continue to use the gift that the Holy Spirit has endowed you with. If you are unsure what your gift may be, I encourage you to spend some time in prayer and explore what your gift may be.

Secondly, I encourage you to continue loving one another, even when it is the last thing on Earth that you feel like. This is the foundation stone that our church is built on. This is what differentiates us from the rest of the world. This is what makes us Christian. This is what makes us unique. This is what Jesus died for.

Our country is on the verge of a new hope and a new beginning with a new leadership. Never before has it been so imperative that we as Christians make a difference in the world that we live in. We can be part of the dialogue, the change and the growth through positive action under the light of Christ. This is how we can and will spread the positive message of Jesus. Let us be part of the change, the hope and the growth. The Christian Church stands for positive change... let us ensure, together, that our love spills over from our altar at St Pauls, into the pews, into the church parking lot, into the streets of Rondebosch, onto the highways that go to Cape Town and even up the N1 and N2 to Johannesburg and Durban. We can be a shining light... a light that never goes out and continually shines into every corner of South Africa. If we all do our little bit, if we all contribute just that much, if we all make a little difference to someone, our country and eventually the world, will continually

become a better place for all and we will have accomplished our mission, just as Jesus accomplished His.

Are you ready to continue serving Him with your gift of love for the betterment of the world around you?

Are you committed to continually loving one another, no matter the cost?

May God bless you this week as you continue to be His light, as you spread His love to one another.

Amen.