

Easter 5 to Trinity



Year B Easter 5

1 John 4.7 - 21

Love's Reason

1 John 4.7 Let's love one another

It's all about LOVE!

Faith, life, the Kingdom is all about loving relationships

- first with God - then with one another

Which is why John challenges with the invitation *Let's love one another!*

The hope of the whole world - its peace, happiness, prosperity is LOVE!

Why Love?

But there are many who will say - 'Why Love?' *Isn't that all a bit sentimental.*

We believe the hope of the world is power of arms and words. Love one another and the whole world takes advantage of you - walks all over you!

Did they not crucify the Lord of Love?

Love's Reason

John has an answer to the question

Let's love BECAUSE

God is Love

and God loves through us

God is Love

BECAUSE: God IS love!

The origin of the cosmos

- the source of all life

- the mind and heart ate the root of everything - IS LOVE!!

For those who would see it there has always been evidence that God is love

but we are privileged to have been shown his love when , even before we loved him,

he sent his only Son, Jesus into the world

to live and die and Rise again

in order to offer us reconciliation with himself

forgiveness for all the barriers we have set up which spoil our relationship with him as our Father

and so to give us LIFE

as his Spirit - the Spirit of Jesus - lives in us

Life that is full and forever!

God loves through us

BECAUSE if we accept this reconciled relationship - the real LIFE

God is living IN us

and perfecting love in our lives

and as we grow in his love we become more and more sure of our relationship with him

The **PROOF** of it is our growing love for other people

no longer is it impossible to love some people

*now it is impossible **not** to love them*

The Challenge

Impossible?

Is God's given way impossible??

John challenges us with the ancient LAW for life

Love God with heart, mind, spirit, strength

and because you love God, love all others in the same way

*Thérèse of Lisieux 'A thimble-glass and a large tumbler can both be full to the brim with
'as much glory as they can take'*

When love filled / God filled people direct the nations

and ordinary people let God's love irradiate their daily lives

the Kingdom will have fully come

Just as it has already come in us

That is not an impossible dream BECAUSE:

The world kingdom begins with *God IS love* and *God is love IN ME.*

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Year B Easter 6

1 John 5. 1 - 6

World Conquering Faith

1 John 5:4 Every child of God is able to defeat the world. we win the victory over the world by means of our faith. Who can defeat the world ? Only the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God

World Conquest !

Political leaders and kings have dreamed of it - and even done battle for it - world conquest

- to possess the world - to have power over it - its people and its wealth

That is not that sort of conquest that John has in mind, however he is not concerned with possession and power but freedom from the shackles and oppression of materialism of greed and self, of what Paul calls things of our lower nature.
FREE - to live in the world but not be its prisoner

to be - as Paul says again - citizens of heaven living as a colony in the world but belonging to the real homeland of the spiritual world free to rise above the pain, hardships, sorrows, oppression the world may inflict

This is an even greater claim than that of any dictator
We are free people in the world - because Christ has overcome the world!
This claim is the right of every Christian
- everyone who believes and is born again to spiritual life through Jesus Christ

A promise to every Christian
World Conquest is yours - for faith !

By Faith

But what is faith ?

We often have such a watered down understanding of faith

thinking of faith like a commodity to be bought in the supermarket - *if I had more faith*
- 'O dear - I forget to get a new packet of faith!'

thinking of faith like a crutch, or a zimmer-frame - *I didn't have enough faith - I forgot my walking stick !*

thinking of faith as a feeling, or like the weather - *my faith was low - I found it hard to believe - if it hadn't been so hot....!*

thinking of faith like a magic potion, or wonder drug
- *two drops on a sugar-lump three times a day !*

Have faith! - we encourage one another
Trust God !

Real Faith

But real faith is different

Real faith is our relationship with God
knowing Christ in us - the power of God's Spirit working in us

Real faith is about overcoming the world !

Real faith is about being in the mountain-moving business !
real faith is about laughing at impossibilities !
protected by our heavenly citizenship - as children of God !

not a little bit of trust, of holding on to God to get me through this crisis, but being in touch with the Lord of the Universe - the Saviour of the World !

Jesus Faith

I am glad John makes it clear
He speaks of overcoming the world not just by 'faith'
but by faith in Jesus as the Son of God
trusting in the victorious power of Jesus
- living in relationship with him

trusting Jesus as Son of God
which means

He is God who was incarnate - who's power created the universe - who is in his world and knows his world
God the Saviour - who died on a Cross for our salvation
God who is alive - victorious over death and sin
God who is the Judge - whose day of and justice will come

Living by Real Faith

If my trust is in Christ
it is so much bigger and more wonderful than any concept of -
'more faith to get me through this trial'

It means: *I believe God is in my world - God is with us - with me!*

How that changes life !
I am not alone.
I am living in the presence of the creator of the universe
the Saviour who has the victory over all the evil in the world
who has overcome death
who is the Judge - who has the last word of love in everything

See how this transforms our living
Not a 'little bit of faith'
But a living relationship with the living God
- as we meet him, know him and live in him - through Jesus

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Year B Easter 7

Psalm 1

Always in Leaf

Psalm 1. 3 Like a tree planted by the river

The ideal Christian life

Springtime!

the beauty of trees in new leaf

- a whole variety of changing hues of yellow and green and purple,
evoking a happy sense of the earth's renewal - of re-awakening life, hope, fulfillment.

The psalmist used the tree in green leaf as a picture of the fulfilled spiritual life.

The ideal - fulfilled - Christian life involves

- having the strength to resist the presence of evil in society
and not be swayed by the advice and example of ungodly people
- being assured that we belong to God
we are children of our heavenly Father
- growing in the image of his Son, Jesus
- finding joy in the truth of God - from the scriptures and their exposition
hearing it - studying it - living by it
- growing in loving obedience to Jesus who is Truth - God's living Word
- trusting and proving what it means to know '*my time is in his hands*' (*Psalm 31.15*) - living on God's timetable!
- having an '*evergreen*' life - sometimes *thirsty* but never *dried out*.
- Being successful - not in material terms but in eternal values
in love - faith - goodness - holiness
a satisfied life!
sometimes troubled when the river is high and the waters rage
but staying rooted

Jesus gave a fuller version of this fulfilled life in *The Beatitudes (Matthew 5)* where he makes it clear that the life is not without hardship, pain, unanswered questions, opposition

As for many Christians today under persecution [e.g. Syrian Church] who stand firm like green-leaf trees beside the water.

A tree beside water

The ideal life is all in this picture of the tree planted beside water which:

- produces ripe fruit in season - at the right time
- has evergreen leaves

there may be times of wilt - when the stream is low - but the leaves do not dry out to become brittle victims of strong winds

- it is fruitful
- fulfills its being - and the purpose of the one who planted it

If we use this as an example of the ideal Christian life
it follows that its success is all to do with

being planted beside water

Water is a favourite image of the Holy Spirit
the Spirit of God - the Spirit of Jesus - the power of his love

Life in the Spirit is to have the life of God at our roots
and flowing through our veins

*The experience of life-giving water which Jesus promised to give to a woman at Sychar
(John 4.10)*

*An image which John takes up in his revelation vision (Revelation 22)
of the river flowing out from the City of God
- the water of life - for the healing of the nations
-for the fulfillment of the Pentecost experience*

Living and Growing in this Christian life is simply
being rooted close to the source
deeper into the life of God in Jesus

Paul encouraged Christians at Colossae - and us here
Keep your roots deep in Christ to have the fullness of life.

The planting, the water, the life is all a gift of God's grace
and it is for ALL
All who ask
and put their roots of faith and love into his love

That is how the first Christians prepared for Pentecost
The preparation began with meeting Jesus alive after his resurrection.
He breathed on them and said:
Receive the Holy Spirit
and they did!



Year B Pentecost

John 15. 26-27. 16. 4b-15

More of Jesus

John 16. 13-14 When the Spirit comes...he will give me glory

The Meaning of Pentecost

Who is the Holy Spirit?

What does the Holy Spirit mean to us?

Wait for the Spirit?

What are we waiting for ?

I am reminded of a sketch - involving a long queue of people which continues to grow on the strength of curiosity and the relayed message - *it's coming!* When the queue reaches some distance along the road, one newcomer naively asks - 'what are we waiting for?' No-one is sure, but *'It's coming!'*

Faithful Christians cry *'We need another Pentecost!'*

- but what does that mean?

- *fireworks - miracles - speaking in tongues - crowds responding to Gospel preaching?*

What does the coming of the Holy Spirit mean for us today ?

If we go to the story - the day of Pentecost - rushing wind - tongues of fire - speaking in many languages - excitement and movement - and mass conversions we only have one aspect of what happened

To understand more fully we have to listen to the teaching of Jesus in which he prepared his disciples for what was to happen - [*here in John 16*]

More of Jesus

The Holy Spirit is the third person of God - the same as God - the same as Jesus.

From personal experience I have come to understand this as three growing experiences of God - of Love. - though that may be doctrinally inadequate.

The Holy Spirit is best understood as *'more of Jesus'*

- a richer and fuller understanding

of who he is

of what he does

of his love - his power - his truth - his glory - the glory of God!

After Pentecost Jesus is no longer just a historical figure linked to first century Palestine.

He is known to be the Son of God,

the living God

creator of the universe

saviour of the world

entering into everyone who believes and makes him welcome

He is *Christ IN us* - in every place for all time - till time ceases

Jesus prepared his people - telling them
*After the time of sadness and loss will come a new gladness
because you will see me again! I'm coming back to you!*

It will all be so much MORE
I can't tell you all I want to now
- there's not time
- you can't bear it or take it in
BUT WHEN THE SPIRIT COMES
when I come back
I/ He will teach you all these things;
show you all the truth about God
- the meaning of love on a cross and the power of new resurrection life

*I will be back - in my Spirit who will teach the whole truth of God
the wonder of his saving grace
and all those amazing things you heard and saw in Galilee and Judaea will be available
through you for the whole world*

More of Jesus involves many other rich gifts:

Gladness

It is difficult for us to imagine the gladness of the first followers of Jesus after his resurrection

Jesus likens it to the experience of childbirth
- the pain is forgotten in the gladness for the life which follows
- their sadness - having passed through the time of the cross
drastically altered their lives
Like Peter and Thomas coming to terms with themselves

Now Jesus was back - *God with us!*
the Cross and the suffering began to make sense
the implications of all this for the whole world began to dawn

and the gladness !!
it was a JOY and PEACE which only he could give
All tied up with ...

His Presence with them always

When the Spirit comes - when I am back with you
It will be for always - every moment

and not only with you but IN you - God in you
like the breath of your body
living my life through you
taking the fear out of life and death
bringing peace, comfort, strength and the power of love into your life

Humbled under the righteousness of God
as we are changed into Christ-like characters of holiness, truth, love
with all the fruits of love
goodness, kindness, gentleness etc [*Galatians 5*]

making life an exciting experience of walking with God

His provision for all their needs

And accepting that life
we are brought into harmony with God
united in the Spirit of God - living in the consciousness that all things work together for
good [*Romans 8*]

and Jesus promised *v23 when that day comes*
you will not ask me for anything
the Father will give you what you ask for in my name
so that your gladness / happiness will be complete

An incredible promise - described as
realising all I need for everything in my life is in Christ

Which is Paul's and so many other Christian's experience (*cf. Philippians 4.19*)
- the needs of my personal life - of salvation - forgiveness - peace with God
the needs of my everyday living
the needs of my church
the needs of my world
- can all be supplied
as I learn to trust God
as I let my life be lived in the quieter and deeper experience of Pentecost

An incredible truth - waiting to be grasped and lived

The Felt Christ

Someone described the experience of Pentecost as '*feeling Christ*'
The Holy Spirit glorifies him by making him real in our daily living



Year B Trinity

Romans 8. 12-17

In the Family Way

Romans 8.16 God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children

After Pentecost

Trinity Sunday is special. It is the celebration of the mystery of God being experienced as Father Son and Holy Spirit

Trinity Sunday always follows immediately on Pentecost Sunday which is good because that is how it happens in our experience

Following the Pentecost events when God's Spirit was poured out with spectacular effects
- electric flashes - strong winds and a babble of different languages understandable by everyone who heard them ..

the first Christians discovered **God the Trinity**

They learned by experience that

God, whom, they knew to be the father of all people,
the creator,

the leader and lover of his people

Had come face to face with them in the person of **Jesus**

And now they had a new experience of him

It was like having Jesus - having God - always around

- with them
- within them
- guiding their thoughts and their lives
- loving and empowering them
- loving, teaching, healing others through them

But most important of all - they discovered
that by opening their lives to the Spirit of Jesus
they became part of a great extended family - God's family
- they were the children of God - sharing the family likeness

*The experience was how Jesus explained it to Nicodemus [John 3]
Just as you cannot explain where the wind blows from, or what it looks like,
so when you open your life to the Holy Spirit - you may not be able to fathom the
mystery or put it into words of theological explanation*

- but you know something has happened
- it is like being born all over again
- born as a child of God - to be a new / renewed person
embraced into the family of God's people.

We still symbolise that in the act of Christian baptism

- *the sign of entry into the church family*

Like the first Christians,
our assurance of Christ
our strength and faith
our vision of his Kingdom
all stem from the discovery that we are family - the children of God

The most important thing is not **MY** conversion
- but that my acceptance of Jesus means being 'family'

Christian Family Life

The story of the first Christians, in the Acts of the Apostles
shows various aspects of the family life they shared

Like any normal family in any culture
they strengthened, comforted and encouraged one another
through sickness,
tragedy,
suffering,
famine,
persecution

they shared their joys and successes
as they prayed and worshipped together

they were an openly hospitable family.
Everyone was welcome to share in the family life

They fell out
just as the first disciples did in Galilee
They disagreed over different understandings of Jesus' intentions,
(sometimes motivated by their personal pride and ambition)

BUT they had the secret of reconciliation
- they were bound together in the love of Christ by his Spirit
as each centred their lives on Jesus

That underlying oneness
which Paul was at great pains to preserve in the first churches (*re. 1 Corinthians*)
gave them unity in their mission and service

*It is too easy to be critical of the church and its fellowship
and fail to realise how important is this family life we share
and how much we owe to it of mutual support and encouragement*

AND how much the family has to offer to the community in which it is set

Bishop Basil of Caesarea in the fourth century wrote - the church family does not exist for its own salvation but for the wider community. The shoes you do not wear are the shoes of those who go barefoot.

That is the pattern of Christ's ministry - constantly repeated in Christian lives through the centuries

***During the years there have been countless people
- and many today who would give testimony to***

- * How they have found strength and comfort in the Christian family in times of sorrow and sickness - to the ministry and friendship which has supported them
- * How they have made their peace with God and found new life in Christ
-responding to the challenges and conviction of his Word
through the words of faithful preachers
- * How they found in the family fellowship
a deeper peace to calm the anxieties and pressures of life
- * How they have celebrated their personal and shared successes as a family
- in baptisms weddings - thanksgivings -
- * How they have shared the word of God
In the regular worship of his people
gaining visions of his Kingdom
Getting involved in the mission of his church locally and in the wider world
- * How they have disagreed, broken relationships
and then found reconciliation -in fellowship

And many more will tell of

- * How they have found an open door - and a welcome

Affirmation

The first church in Jerusalem and beyond grew
NOT by many repeats of the Pentecost fireworks
BUT by the everyday routine,
the exciting and empowering experiences
of being 'Jesus' people where they were
- in worship and learning - in mission and service to ALL

Henri Nouwen - Just as Jesus came among us to reveal God's love, so the Church is his people called together to make his presence visible in today's world