

Maundy Thursday 2nd April 2026

Exodus 12: 1-14. Psalm 116:1, & 10-17. Corinthians 11:23-26. John 13:1-35

This morning, I was at Cornbank Primary School for their end of term assembly. Never an easy gig. The children were excited about their forthcoming holidays, and I had to try and find something that would interest P1's through to P7's simultaneously! I am not sure any training for the priesthood can really help in such situations.

In that assembly I focussed on the last two verses of this evening's gospel reading:

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

And I thought that tonight, I should have a second attempt at reflecting on those words, to hopefully a less challenging set of listeners, although with a slightly wider age range.

So, tonight, I am going to talk about the love that God has for us. The love we hear spoken of in the New Testament, the example of God's love in the life of Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ. And the love that led him to his Passion, death and resurrection.

Jesus' ministry was full of examples of how we can learn to live peaceably with everyone else. The word love is used a lot, but we know in the English language, the word 'love' has to do a lot of heavy lifting! It is a 'fat' word, with many different meanings. Strangely, for the English language, we do not have words to reflect the nuances and types of love, whereas the Greek language has ones that are used in the New Testament that all get translated into English as 'love'.

To say I love chocolate, or I love music, or I love Arsenal FC, is quite different to if I say a romantic 'I love you' to someone. It is also different too, if I say I love spending time with my friends and I love them, or that I love my congregations.

The Greek word 'philia' means the fondness and care we have for friends and family, for people in our community that we know and care for.

The Greek word 'agape' means the unconditional love that God has for all of God's children. So that means the love God has for each one of us, and for all the people on earth, without exception.

In John's gospel, the new commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples used the word 'agape'.

Jesus taught his disciples about agape – unconditional love for everyone – and one of the best ways to teach someone about how to live a life of agape was to live that way himself. So Jesus showed love, care, and compassion for everyone he met – even those people who did not like him and felt threatened by his teachings. Even to Judas over that last meal together, even to those who came to arrest him and to Pontius Pilate whose dilemma Jesus understood, and had pity for him. Jesus could see Pilate's love of power, and that his whole future in the role depended on him using force, fear and violence. The cost to Pilate of choosing love was too great for him; Pilate was unwilling to sacrifice his position of wealth and power, his social standing and political influence, to risk any trouble by showing justice to this man before him.

Unfortunately, before and since Christ's passion, humankind has time and time again chosen violence and power over God's perfect love of agape. Over the last five weeks we have witnessed how just a few powerful people can use force and violence and cause fear and

trauma to so many people, and cause consequences far beyond the initial choices. A bit like Judas leaving the meal on that fateful night and choosing to leave that space of the light and truth of Jesus and go out into the dark of night to betray Jesus.

Luckily, time and again, we have seen that love does not get extinguished. It may go quiet for a time, it may lay hidden for a time, but that is not permanent. Love springs forth, love erupts, like snowdrops and daffodils from hard as iron earth. Love is stronger than darkness, love is stronger than evil. God's timing is not our timing, but the arc of God's righteousness and justice bends back down to earth. All evil schemes and empires are eventually swept away, and healing and restitution can begin.

Love is not always easy to offer. Love of any sort; brother and sisterly love, God's love for all that we are called to model, and romantic love; they all require sacrifices of one sort or another. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice, for us and all humankind.

There is an Iona Community liturgy that states, 'I will not offer something that costs nothing'. It is affirming that when we offer something to God, it will not be insignificant. We have had to make a deliberate choice to commit; commit maybe time to a cause, or money to support a cause for social justice, peace or the environment, and because of that we will not be able to do something else of personal value. It is a reminder that if we are serious about our faith, we cannot pay lip service to it, and we willingly make some sort of sacrifice so as to advance God's kingdom on earth.

Whatever we sacrifice, it is nothing compared to the sacrifice of Jesus that we contemplate in the three days we have entered.

When I think of the sacrifices, I find the last two verses of Psalm 122 useful. Verse 8 and 9 of Ps 122 states:

⁸ For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you."

⁹ For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.

When we take action to ensure someone has peace within them, and when we take action to seek their good, we are living out God's agape. As I explained to the children this morning, if you have one last chocolate left, (who remembers the advert for Rollo's?) would you give it away? Maybe that is a test of who you love? You have sacrificed a precious chocolate that you would have enjoyed eating – the last one in a packet is always the most valued and precious, is it not?

And maybe that is why living a life where we seek to follow Jesus' example of agape and philia is so hard. It requires a sacrifice – putting someone else's interests ahead of our own.

Our Gospel reading finished with Jesus' new commandment:

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

As we try and grasp once more the love Jesus had for his disciples and for all humankind, knowing it would lead to his death, may we be inspired to commit to seeking the good for all other people and pray that they will have peace within them. For surely, that is how we share in our own small ways in bringing glimpses of God's kingdom to our small part of the world.

Peace be within you. I will seek your good.