

## **Sunday 10 May – Sixth Sunday of Easter**

### **Sermon by Revd Becca Rogers, Associate Priest at Victoria Docks Ascension Church**

*As it is café church from St. Luke's, there is no sermon from there for this week. Instead, the Diocesan sermon is shown below and can be listened to at [Weekly Sermons from the Diocese of Chelmsford](#)*

At school one of my friends used to talk about 'mentionitis'. If one of us was interested in something or someone, and we just kept dropping them into conversation, she would say 'you've got mentionitis'.

A lot of preachers have this: something that they are passionate about and they use any chance to talk about it. For a retired vicar I used to work with, it was healing and healing prayer, for my training incumbent, it was mission. I bet our congregation at Ascension could tell you which themes come up again and again in my preaching.

For the evangelist John, his mentionitis is about love. Not a bad theme really, for a follower of Jesus. The word love appears 57 times in John's gospel and then in his letters another 46 times. John wants the Christians to be filled with God's love, and to live out that love towards others in a real and genuine way. As Jesus here promises the coming of the Holy Spirit, we see how it is possible to live this way.

This passage takes place following the last supper, the night before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus has already washed the disciples' feet and told them that He has to go away to prepare a place for them. The disciples are distressed: their lives have been so focussed on Jesus that the thought of losing him is likened to being orphaned.

But Jesus' words are full of assurance.

'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you'.

A few weeks ago our gospel reading was the Road to Emmaus. At our church we looked at an image of Jesus walking with the disciples on that road. We thought about what a privilege it must have been to hear his voice,

to know his mannerisms and experience first-hand the wisdom that he shared.

This is a physical knowledge of Jesus that we do not have but incredibly, Jesus' language here paints a very similar, if not an even closer picture.

Jesus promises that He will not leave the disciples, He will come to them. He promises that the Father will send the Holy Spirit, who he calls another advocate to be with the disciples forever. The word that is used here is *paraclete* which means something like the one who comes alongside. *Para* meaning alongside and *kalein* to call. Just as Jesus walked beside the disciples on the road, so He is promising that the Holy Spirit will be called to be alongside them, not just for a journey but forever.

Then there's a throwaway line which could almost be missed. After showing the Holy Spirit as one who comes alongside the disciples, Jesus adds 'for He lives with you and will be in you'.

This sense is repeated later 'On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.'

The unconditional love between God the Father and Jesus, which has existed for all time is a reality which we are invited into through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us, uniting us into that eternal love, bringing the very love of God into our hearts. Notice that Jesus says 'another' advocate. The first advocate is Jesus. He came to save, forgive, guide, comfort and lead His people into all truth. The Holy Spirit comes to us, to live *in our hearts* to continue that work.

We are being assured here of the closest possible union with God.

I loved this quote:

'If God and Christ have made their home with us, how can we imagine that there is any distance between us and God'

I wonder whether your experience of that love may be up and down. For so very many reasons we doubt the love of God, and the work of God in our lives. Perhaps these images may be helpful for you to meditate on. The Holy Spirit coming alongside, *paraclete*, to be with you forever. And the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, drawing you into God's love and guiding and comfort and truth.

Maybe you might find it helpful to spend some time this week meditating on those images, asking God to make them even more real than they might be now.

Of course, for John this love of God does not end with us. We cannot receive this gift of love and not be changed by it.

Our passage begins and ends with a similar message:

‘If you love me, keep my commands’

‘Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.’  
There’s this close link with loving Jesus and following His commands.

For John, the commands of Jesus boil down to one key thing. In washing the disciples’ feet earlier in the meal, Jesus has shown what this looks like and then twice he spells it out

‘my command is this; love each other as I have loved you’.

Because I didn’t leave enough time to warn people about footwear this year, we opted for hand washing, instead of feet. A colleague and I went around the table taking people’s hands, washing them and drying them with a towel.

I always find this such a beautiful and moving action. Loving people in their easy and harder to love characteristics. Meeting them in their struggles and their faith and honouring them in this way. These are people who I seek to love throughout the year and who I am grateful, seek to love me back so it feels a powerful symbol.

Ultimately, this is an act of service. It is saying I choose to lay aside my rights and privileges to love and serve you. That’s what Jesus did and that’s how he calls us to live. ‘If you love me’, he says ‘keep my commands’.

What would our lives look like, what would the world look like if we loved in this way? To choose to love both friend and stranger with a humble, sacrificial love.

Tragically, some of the so-called Christianity getting attention at the moment is all about arguing for rights and fighting for privileges. It sees love as deserved by some, but not all, and there is little humility nor service. This has little to do with Jesus who washed His disciples’ feet, promised to

fill His disciples with love and then commanded them to love others in the same way.

How do we model something different? Loving in this way is hard.

Well, this passage reminds us that firstly, we must receive. The Holy Spirit walks alongside us, even within us, to make God's love known to us. Let's receive that gift in full through prayer, meditation, asking God to open our eyes to His love. And then, let us follow Jesus' command to love generously. To love sacrificially, humbly, putting our rights and privileges aside loving family, friend and stranger alike. As we are loved, so our greatest command is to love. 'If you love me, keep my commands'. Amen