**9 May 2021, Easter 6**

**Acts 10: 44-48; I John 5: 1-6**

**John 15: 9-17**

**1. Abide in my love**

In church last week, I spent some time reflecting on that lovely word ‘abide’, and we thought about what it means to abide in God. ‘Home’, we say, ‘is where the heart is’ – and if our hearts are indeed with God, then our life is truly eternal. Today’s gospel reading follows on from that we heard last week, and develops the theme of abiding in God, but takes us further – to a commandment, and also to the consequences of this life rooted in God.

**2. One Commandment**

You have probably had the experience of going away somewhere and leaving last minute instructions for those left behind. They are usually rather mundane things like ‘make sure you water the plants’, or ‘don’t forget to send your cousin a birthday card next week.’ There are certain things that we want to be sure people will remember. Moreover, they are things we cannot do ourselves when we are somewhere else.

Our gospel passage is taken from what are often called ‘farewell discourses’ – words spoken by Jesus on the night before he died. Now his situation is very different from ours when we are going for a short holiday. He knows that he will be leaving these friends who have been with him for over 3 years – and not returning to be with them as he has been before. And it is vitally important that they remember the things that are most important.

This commandment is so important that the writer of the gospel repeats it almost word for word – in chapter 13 and now in chapter 15. For so long, as they have followed Jesus, teaching and healing, he has spoken to his disciples in parables or riddles – and frequently they have clearly not got the point. Now he has little or no time left, and it is vital that his closest friends of his ‘get the message.’ It is a message that he has just acted out by washing their feet. Now he spells it out in words: ‘love one another as I have loved you.’ And his following words indicate that this may even mean laying down their lives for each other. This too he will illustrate through his own actions as well as his words.

He goes on to say that they are not his servants but his friends. This is about their relationship with him – but also their relationship with each other. Friendship means that they are fully informed about what he is doing, and that this ‘commandment’ is not a ‘top-down’ one, but one made in that spirit of close friendship. They are to love each other not because they have been told to, but because they want to, on account of their mutual love.

This is quite a tall order. The disciples are very different to each other, and it is clear – not only from the life of Jesus so far - but also from what will follow, that some even more unexpected companions will be introduced to their fellowship. Remember Zaccheus – the tax collector who was called to meet Jesus? Throughout his time with them, Jesus has upset convention by including people who were not acceptable socially.

And this will continue. The passage we heard from Acts is from when Peter was told to go to the house of Cornelius – a Gentile centurion. He and his companions are astonished to find that they too are included in God’s people. This debate about whether Gentiles might also be saved was one that caused much dissention in the early church, leading to the first Church Council in Jerusalem held to sort it out. It was not a trivial matter but one that caused deep division – you can read all about it in Acts chapters 8 to 16.And this moment, when those in the House of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit, was a turning point in Peter’s own understanding and in what was to follow.

Before he died, Jesus said ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you.’ This meant then – and it also means now – that we will find ourselves with some unexpected companions on the road of faith. We need to hear this message in the Church today, and not assume that our brothers and sisters in the Church will all be like us, or think like us. Those who are called to be friends of Jesus and with each other within the love of Jesus were never called to be a cosy like-minded huddle.

**3. …and consequences, for others and self.**

So that is the commandment – Jesus’s final instructions. And just as our instructions when we go away may be for the well being of others (whether our plants or our family members), so his too are for those he loves.

But he also points to 2 consequences of obeying this commandment. The first is that we will bear fruit. If we love one another, our lives will **make a difference**. What is more, this is a difference that will last. There are many ways in which our lives can make a difference – some private and personal, within our own community, and some on a wider scale. Today is the start of Christian Aid Week - perhaps a good time to ask what difference our lives can and do make on an international canvas. yet of course we are also called to make a difference locally, in our dealings with neighbours and friends.

The second consequence is that ‘your joy may be complete.’ This command to love one another is not just for the benefit of others, we are told that it leads to pure joy. So often we think of loving others as something that will involve gritting our teeth – and certainly we are right to acknowledge that love is costly. But these are costs that bring joy. Joy is not temporary happiness but a deep seated and lasting state. It comes of certainty that we are loved ourselves. And this is God’s purpose and promise for us. Jesus says ‘I have said these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.’

When I looked at the readings for today, I was struck by the words of the Collect. It asks that ‘as by his death he has recalled us to life, so by his continual presence in us, he may raise us to eternal joy.’ So this is my prayer for us all today –that God’s continual presence in us may enable us to truly love one another, and also bring us ‘eternal joy.’

**Amen**