

On the night before he was killed, Jesus told his disciples,

*"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another".*

Easter has come and gone now, so we know what happens next. Jesus is killed but returns a few days later to the astonishment of all. They are afraid; they are in doubt. But Jesus tells them the Spirit will come and they will know what they have to do next.

2 weeks ago we heard about how, after the events of Good Friday and Easter, some of the disciples went back to their former occupation of fishing in Galilee. And not too successfully either. The resurrected Jesus appeared to them in the middle of their labour and prepared a fish breakfast for them on the beach.

An ordinary setting, an ordinary occasion, except that the living Christ was there in the middle of it, giving them their marching orders.

After this remarkably ordinary breakfast, Jesus takes Peter aside and asks him a rather important question relating to his earlier instruction: Do you Love me? This is a *reasonable* question considering that Peter had abandoned Jesus in his hour of darkness, that he had denied knowing him, that even after he had seen the resurrected Christ, he had seemingly given up the cause and returned to his former trade of fishing for fish.

Peter answers, yes I love you, and Jesus tells Peter all he needs to know about the Mission: Feed my sheep. English is a wonderful language. It is so expressive and creative and can be made to do many things. But it does let us down in some respects, especially in this story about the fish breakfast.

Jesus asks Peter, do you love me, using the Greek word for the highest form of love, *agapao*. What we don't get in the English translation is that Peter responds with a different word, the word for friendship, *phileo*.

Jesus asks him again and gets the same response, Yes, Jesus, you know I am your friend, and I care for you. But Jesus had asked him if he cared for him more than anything else. And Peter, staring into the eyes of God could not lie; he says to Jesus: Lord you know everything.

And Peter could not answer *Agapao* Se, I love you far and above all else, I will sacrifice everything in your service. And so the third time Jesus sadly asks him, do you love me as a friend?

Deeply troubled by his failure, AGAIN, Peter answers him, Yes, as a friend, I love you.

Which reminds me of a Dylan song lyric!

*"Do you love me, or are you just extending good will?"*

*Do you need me half as bad as you say, or are you just feeling guilt?*

*I've been burned before so I know the score, you won't hear me complain.*

*Will I be able to count on you, or is your love in vain?"*

How do we show LOVE for one another? We can shake hands with our best buddies, a slap on the back. We can give our life partner a kiss & a hug. We can give our children or grandchildren a kiss and a hug, but it's qualitatively different to the one reserved for our life-partners. How do we show our love for God? We know he loves us and he has already *shown* this Love. The disciple who was there with Peter and heard the commission to feed his sheep wrote: *"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God...God is Love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."*

In today's gospel Jesus says: *"And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* John reminds us of this:

*"The commandment we have is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."*

We show this love, AGAPE, for God by the AGAPE we show to others. Not PHILOS, EROS, or STORGE which can each be translated as "love". Those all have their place but vary according to established relationships: love between friends, between our life partners, and among our family.

John explicitly tells us what that means::

*"Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action".*

I am to see in ALL my fellow humans a quality of infinite value. And then I am to care for my neighbours with the same love that I have for God.

This AGAPE, this higher love, is a practical love, an active love, a caring compassion which puts the needs and desires of others before my own. It's getting out of my seat and doing things for others anywhere in the world, a response from a heart already filled with the love from God; it's an acceptance of the work of the Holy Spirit in my life.

Hundreds of years ago, in the 1960s, this was the message that I learned growing up in California, showing love and respect to everyone. It was the Summer of Love, but somehow that message got garbled up, swept aside and lost in the media circus that the 1960s became. English hippies may have been singing about going to San Francisco, but *in* San Francisco all the bands were singing this song:

*"Some will come and some will go, and we shall surely pass  
when the one that left us here returns for us at last.*

*We are but a moment's sunlight fading on the grass...*

*So, if you hear the song I sing, you will understand.*

*You hold the key to love and fear all in your trembling hand.*

*Just one key unlocks them both; it's there at your command:*

*Come on people, let's get together, smile on your brother; try to love one another right now."*

*Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.*