

## As I have loved you. St L's / Minster 24/4/16

Living Lord Jesus, open our hearts afresh to your words of love, that your name may be glorified .  
Amen.

John 13<sup>34</sup> “ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you.”

It was night. A breath of night air momentarily chilled the Upper Room as the door opened and closed behind Judas Iscariot, whose cold purpose was treachery and betrayal. Jesus did not prevent him, but instead had said : “ Do quickly what you are going to do. “ The moment Judas left the room, Jesus knew his fate was sealed. Yet he turned to his unsuspecting friends and declared: “Now has the Son of Man been glorified,( not will be, notice, **has been**- it's already a fait accompli ) and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. “ What's all this about glory, when degradation and agonising death stare Jesus in the face ? And why does the church reading scheme take us back to this moment, when we've already had Easter ?

The action of Jesus in letting Judas go was a supreme act of obedience to his Father's will. From that moment , everything that followed became inevitable. His suffering and death were not an unfortunate accident. They were his deliberate and calculated choice. Does that make him yet another extreme publicity-seeking fanatic ? No. It propels us into a holy mystery beyond all imagining. Jesus was soon to say of himself :” Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” Earlier, he had infuriated the religious authorities by declaring “ Before Abraham was I AM “ I AM was the name by which God referred to himself to Moses , and Jesus here claimed it as his own. So the passion and death of Christ did not just involve a man called Jesus. They were the divine work of God in all his fullness. I never tire of quoting from the gem of a poem about Jesus in St Paul's letter to the church at Colossae:

He is the Image of the Invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and earth were created....all things have been created in him and for him....For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself , whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

That's the Glory ! The events of Holy Week reveal to us the true nature of God. He is all love. Within his being, there is a never-ending exchange of love between Father, Son and Spirit, in which each of them act to glorify the others. On the cross, evil, sin and death are absorbed, overwhelmed and neutralised by the power of this divine love. God in Christ opens wide his arms toward us in total love and acceptance. As we gaze upon the cross, our hearts are changed, our sins are cancelled, and we consent to his invitation to accept divine love and share the divine life. Glory is for us too, because our humanity has been consecrated in Jesus, enabling us to love God in return. There are no words to express the magnitude of this gift, or the depth of our gratitude. We fall silent in awe and worship. Glory be to God.

This glory is the focus of all our prayers. It's the core of this sacrament. It's the reason for our celebration of Easter. And when we've prayed, and received and celebrated, what then? Today's Gospel reading takes us back to the Upper Room, and confronts us with the answer.

Jesus prepares his friends for a radical shift in their discipleship. He's about to leave them, and, for the time being, they won't be able to be in his visible, tangible presence. Nor are we. So his instructions to his friends are for us too. He hasn't left us with a weighty text-book. Just 3 sentences. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. **As I have loved you**, so you must love one another. By this shall everyone know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Not an aspiration to be aimed at, a goal to try for- a **commandment**, directly from God incarnate. An order which must be obeyed. We must love others **as he has loved us**. Utterly. Purely. Undeservedly. Irresistibly. Eternally. Divinely. It should only take us a split second to realise that, in our own strength that's completely impossible. So Jesus has commanded us to do something that is totally beyond us. Isn't it?

Strangely, it is when we acknowledge our failure that Jesus teaches us to depend on Him and deepens his life within us, enabling us to share in his work of glory after all. Paul in Colossians speaks of us Christians as a rich mystery hidden throughout the ages but now revealed – "Christ in you, the hope of glory". Yes, in us, in you and me!

Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch Christian woman. She and her family gave shelter to persecuted Jews during the Nazi occupation of Holland. She and her sister ended up in Ravensbrück concentration camp. Her sister died there. After the war Corrie became a Christian speaker. At a church service in Munich she recognised a former SS man who had been a guard at the camp. He approached her, saying "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein. To think that as you say, He has washed my sins away!" He put out his hand to shake hers. She kept hers at her side. Angry, vengeful thoughts flooded her mind. She realised the sin of them. Jesus had **died** for this man. Was she going to ask for more? "Lord Jesus", she prayed, "forgive me and help me to forgive him". She writes: "I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me **your** forgiveness" She goes on:

"As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on **our** forgiveness any more than **our** goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on Christ's. When he tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, **the love itself**."

We're going to keep a short time of silence now. In the silence, we're going to gaze on Jesus in our minds eye, as he hangs there on the cross. Then, we're going to try to bring to mind anyone whom we find it difficult or impossible to love. Especially perhaps someone belonging to this church, or the wider parish. Maybe they've hurt us. Maybe we just can't take to them. Maybe there's some other reason. Think of that person, and simply bring them to Jesus on the cross and hold them there before him. Then, whatever we feel about them, we're going to ask for Christ's love in our hearts and minds for that very person. We're going to ask God to bless that person, or maybe it's more than one person, and bless us in our relationship with them and with him. I invite you to try to do that with me now. [ SILENCE FOLLOWS ]

Closing prayer:

Grant us , O God our Father , the love that is always ready to forgive; the love that is always ready to help; the love that delights to give rather than to get. And so grant that living in love, we may live like Jesus. Amen. [ from New Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun , Hodder and Stoughton 1982 ]

Quotations from “The Hiding Place” by Corrie Ten Boom, published by Hodder and Stoughton in paperback. Available from Amazon.