

Sunday 4 October 2020

Encourage One Another

John 13:34 Love one another

Lord of all,

help us to come to you not just as an outward gesture,
but in heart and mind and soul.

Help us to make space in our hectic lives
to be still in your presence,
and so may we live in you and you in us.

Accept us now as we come to you,
and use us for your kingdom.

As I come into God's presence, I choose to praise him in the words of Psalm 95:1-7a

- 1 O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- 2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
- 3 For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
- 6 O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
- 7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

There are many places in Scripture that encourage us in our relationships with one another. Over the coming weeks we will reflect of some of these 'one anothering' passages, starting with the most common, and the only command Jesus gives to his followers, to love one another.

When [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, 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. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my

disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:31–35, see also John 15:12, 17; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 14, 23; 4:7, 11f; 2 John 1:5)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us it is not enough to love only those who love us (Matthew 5:43ff). Is Jesus now softening his position? And what is ‘new’ about this command? Loving our neighbour is at the heart of Israel’s law (see Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:28ff). This new instruction, however, comes in a context that underlines the radical demand Jesus is making. This is Jesus’ final meal with his disciples. He knows this and uses the occasion to make one last appeal to his friends. The meal begins with Jesus washing the disciples’ feet, showing by example the way they should act towards each other. This is followed by a one-to-one encounter with Judas, which has added poignancy, given what has just happened.

In this context, Jesus’ command to love those closest to us is in no way a soft option. Indeed, the church, which has a generally good record of showing love to the outsider, is marred by its internal relationships. The way Christians treat Christians is a stain on the church’s history. Jesus is preparing his disciples for the mission ahead. How we relate to one another is of vital importance. It is because of our love for each other that we will be noticed and remembered.

Jesus tells us that his decision to lay down his life is his keeping God’s command (John 10:18), and the mark of his love for God (14:31 and 15:12). What is new, therefore, is not the command to love but that Jesus is asking his followers to enter into the love that marks the relationship between God and Jesus. By acts of love we declare that we follow Jesus and belong to God (see 14:15, 21, 23; 15:12). Keeping this command is the identifying mark of discipleship: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.” This love derives from the incarnation (see 3:16), and it is the tangible sign of our abiding in Jesus (15:10).

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews asks us to “consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds” (10:24). We pause and pray, asking how we may love one another today.

Pause and pray

As we go let’s hear some familiar words from the apostle Paul, as he encourages us to love one another.

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (Philippians 2:1f)

Gracious God,
take our faith, flawed though it is,
our love, poor though it may be,
and our commitment, for all its imperfections,
and use us in your service
to make known your gracious purpose,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.