

John 15:9-17

9 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

12 My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

17 This is my command: love each other.

Love each other

John 15:9-17

In this teaching Jesus is explaining what is at the heart of the gospel, the truth which is really central to our whole existence. God is love. He loves us without condition and he wants us, as Jesus puts it, to remain or abide in His love. To have an attitude of love to the people around us, whoever they are. This is *agape* love. The English word love covers too many meanings from loving cake to loving your partner. The bible uses the Greek word *agape* to describe unconditional love aimed at bettering the lives of others, and by extension the whole of society. *Agape* isn't born just out of emotions, or feelings or attraction, but from the will and as a choice. *Agape* requires faithfulness, commitment, and sacrifice without expecting anything in return. It seems a simple thing until you start to think about how fallible we all are and prone to selfishness.

And.... it's a command, and not a suggestion. Not, guys, try and love each other. He's very direct.

Love each other as I have loved you.

We resist commands like this because by our nature we're rebellious, and we don't like being told what to do.

But there's something here that I think we need to understand, which I feel personally I missed the significance of, which is that love is absolutely fundamental to all existence.

That the command to love applies to all of humanity. Because the creator is the source of love. In fact the creator is love. We were created out of love. And the mess we made is because we don't keep the command to love.

Why is it that within church, within the family of believers, we often assume that this law of love only really applies to Christians? Jesus is alone with the disciples at this point. So clearly it starts with Jesus's teaching. But Jesus speaks to all people because He wants this for all people. All those who do *not* believe need to hear it just as much, in fact more so, than those who have accepted that Jesus is who he claimed to be, and who have already committed their lives to Him.

Jesus kept the command to love. And so we were saved.

And He says he has told us all this so that our joy may be complete. Now for most people we really can't say our joy is complete. In fact far from it. But if you've rejected the idea that there is a God and believe that everything comes about by chance, and that the universe is the only reality there is, then joy and love are, in the bigger scheme of things, very short lived and transitory ideas. Looking around at the world this seems to be borne out by much of the evidence. There is a big gap between what we preach and what the world believes and practises.

Jesus of all people found that to be true.

So what was it about Him that changed the world and enabled us to see God? To be connected with God?

It was this *agape* love, this love without condition. Love which comes from God, the source of love. We did not invent love, we discovered it, it's the mark of the creator in each one of us.

And of course when I started to think more about it, although Jesus uses the word 'command', real love cannot be commanded, because it's not authentic if it's in response to a demand.

My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.

What he is really saying is slightly mischievous because he knows that at one level it's impossible. The statement contains a paradox, love must be given freely and voluntarily, it cannot be commanded. What it really means is that the mission of God, the reason we pray 'Thy kingdom come', is that we might produce loving community, and eradicate sin and division and fear. The role model we're given is God himself, Father, Son and Spirit who are in a relationship of pure love and self-giving. We have to ditch the old ideas of the Old Testament God as a remote, judgemental figure who exercises power over us, and understand that love is about submission to each other.

I 5 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

So Jesus is bringing us *within* the relationship of Father Son and Spirit and not *under* its power. We're drawn into God's presence. This is revolutionary for some, but it's here in the words of Jesus. He's made known to us *everything* the Father taught.

What might be called transparency in political language. *Everything* will be brought into the light. Gerard Sloyan in his commentary says this: “Jesus puts matters directly...saying something like: “We shall be friends, you and I. No more of this I up here and you down there, you the object of my affection and I the subject of your veneration. We are both subjects undergoing the passion and pain of love.”

And so God’s Kingdom Love creates healthy community, which is the fruit that Jesus is talking about.

We’re called to love as God loves, love and be loved because love cannot exist outside of relationship. God is love and God is relationship.

And so if you look at the big picture, if there isn’t this element of interconnectedness to it, our society as a whole will eventually disintegrate. Community will suffer, and we can see this happening around us, certainly in cities, with political issues like Brexit dividing communities, although in villages like ours it’s less likely. Our tendency as a nation is to feel that we’re strong if we can cope without needing help. There is this feeling very prevalent certainly in older age groups that we don’t want to be seen as dependent or vulnerable because that is weakness. But I think the big positive coming from the pandemic is the realisation that we need each other.

Agape love makes itself vulnerable. Jesus, we’re told could have commanded legions of angels to rescue him, but he did not.

His submission to his inevitable death was the most powerful act of love in human history.

The christian writer Brené Brown says this: “You can acquire and accumulate and accomplish with independence, but you love and live with need.” And so our independence is meaningless without need. We need each other. This is how all the good in our society comes about, through our *interdependence*.

The recognition that we all have something to give but we also all have needs.

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

So the love Jesus teaches us about is the driving force behind all that is good. We look at the division and hatred and polarisation and prejudice in the world, the glorification of profit and accumulation of property, and we can see that it doesn’t accomplish anything positive.

The message of the gospel is that we can and must work for the healing of our community and for the fruit that comes from putting our own needs second to the needs of others, while trusting that others will also do the same