

PENTECOST 22

29/10/23

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

From generation to generation, you are our God;

we praise and worship you!

Creator of our world, life force of every human being;

we praise and worship you!

Author of time, yet above and beyond all time;

we praise and worship you!

Steadfast in your love, each new day;

we praise and worship you!

Opening Prayer

With our lips we praise you, O God;

**lips that speak of your awesome creation,
and the wonder of your love.**

With our minds we praise you, God;

**minds to understand the depth of your compassion,
and to work out your way of justice and mercy.**

With our hearts we praise you, O God;

**hearts to feel the generosity of your beloved one, Jesus,
and to respond with faithful discipleship. Amen.**

HYMN 398 Come down, O Love divine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edK3Vv7Qwo4>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Eternal God, we worship you with hearts full of praise and adoration. You existed before all else and yet, because you are a God of love, you are with us now in Jesus Christ and through the power of your Spirit. Our minds find it difficult to grasp the extent of such love and such grace. You, who created this world with its diverse and colourful landscapes have shown how, in Jesus, you care even for the landscapes of our hearts, our souls and our minds. Gifted with his life, our lives flourish and grow in ways undreamed of by the psalmist, and fear of withering and dying has been taken away. May our worship, our witness and the service of our lives reveal the extent of our gratitude for these blessings so lovingly bestowed upon us.

When the destination eludes us,
we might forget the gift
your presence is with us
as we travel on the way.

When persecutions beset us,
we might dismiss the gift
your hope can offer
for a time better than today.

When life sees us disconnected,
we might forget the gift
your love is for us, through us,
ever here to stay.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Though we might forget,
God does not.
Love remains faithful,
hopeful, present – always.

Trust in love and live in peace.

Amen.

READINGS

- **1 Thessalonians 2:1–8**

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain,² but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.³ For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery,⁴ but, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals but to please God, who tests our hearts.⁵ As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed,⁶ nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others,⁷ though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.⁸ So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

- **Matthew 22:34–46**

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35 and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him. 36 “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37 He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: 42 “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” 43 He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

44 ‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet” ’?

45 “If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” 46 No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

HYMN 137 For the beauty of the earth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hh4WlpxxUMo>

SERMON

Reflecting on what is happening in our world this past week it is perhaps strange, but important, for us to be talking about love!

How is it possible to command someone to love?

Even if we move past the common idea of a warm attraction to another person and give it some deeper thought there seems to be some confusion about what we are seeking to do in response to God’s command to love.

If we think carefully about it there is almost something self-contradictory about commanding someone to love.

If it is only done in response to an order, is that true love?

You can tell a child to say ‘thank you’ and if they are in the mood that will respond nicely. But there isn’t much to be gained to ask a child to say ‘thank you’ when they don’t really mean it. It is only as your child grows in maturity that they develop a genuine sense of gratitude. Once the child has a more fully developed sense of gratitude you can also hope that they know when to express it appropriately.

I think that the development of love in a child comes in the same way, through experience. This means that a person may find it very hard to comprehend what it entails when Jesus tells us to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

To be fair to Jesus, He was not actually addressing that command here. Jesus was simply reciting a command from Jewish Law after being questioned by a Sadducee. The context of this question here is important: “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

Some people might have wanted Jesus to say that all 613 commandments that the rabbis had collated should be seen as equally important.

However if you love God and love others as yourself then the others have no importance as you would be automatically fulfilling them. So we can now consider that Jesus was simply drawing out the fact that by following the

idea of love we can see the other Commandments as basically being a form of guidance showing the implications of love.

To look at this question more completely we now need to delve into a grammar lesson. If you know me that means that it is something that is not my forte. Ancient Greek grammar is even worse for me.

The way that the form of the verb 'love' is constructed here is unusual. In English we can use the same verb in different ways. The spelling does not change when we do this. In the language of the New Testament Greek the word can change with each context.

If I say, "John will go to the shop," the word "go" is in the future form. But if I say "John, go to the shop now!" the word "go" is in the imperative form which means that instead of describing what is going to happen, I am giving John an order. In Greek it would be the ending of the word instead of the order of the words that made the distinction clear.

Now in our reading, the word "love" is actually in the future form, not the imperative form. It reads more like a prediction that we will love than a command that we must love. Now the Ancient Greek experts say that it is a future form with an implied imperative, but the fact remains that it is not the normal imperative and the command nature of the statement is muted by something that has at least a hint of a promise to it.

And in fact if we go and look at what Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, you'll find that the whole command reads: "Hear O Israel – the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." The emphasis of command is actually on the "Hear O Israel." The "You will love the Lord your God..." is what we are commanded to hear, and it has that slightly ambiguous blend of promise and implied command.

So the meaning is sort of half way in between "You are commanded to love," and "Listen up everyone. There's good news. The day is coming when we will all love God and we will all love one another." Perhaps I'm wrong in saying that its half way in between. It's more both held together in a kind of creative tension.

Here ends the grammar lesson.

But what are we to make of what came out of it? Does it make any difference to our question about whether it makes sense to give a command to love? I think the answer is Yes. Let me explore this with you.

In my opinion the combined promise and command shows that love is not completely 'black and white.' Such as either you are doing it or you are not. Love in this passage can be seen as something in which there is always room for improvement but it is also a concept which is going to take us on a journey to a new way of looking at heaven and the new earth which we can experience deep inside.

I doubt that there is anyone who doesn't have some semblance of love in them. At the same time I equally consider that no one can even approach to love we have seen in Christ. In responding to the command to love we can recognise that we are not just doing it because of the love commandment. I hope that it can prompt us to make that extra effort to improve on what we have already attempted to achieve. That commandment sets us an even more important goal to strive for.

And that's where the promise comes in – the promise that changes the whole feel of the command. The promise tells us that the striving is not in vain. The promise tells us that every little step forward that we make in learning to love God and love one another now is worthwhile because it is preparing us for a promised future where love will come to fruition.

The promise tells us that every time we push ourselves a little further down the path of love we are putting another nail in the coffin of the callous indifference and hard-hearted greed that have reigned destructively over our world for far too long. Every move of love forces open the gate a little wider for the full reign of love to come marching in and gather up all things into the glorious communion of love that is the heart of God.

Sure, sometimes our efforts at being loving will not be much more sophisticated than a small child saying thank you because he's told to. And at times the way of love will be regarded by everyone around us as the way of losers – so much so that we'll want to forget it and succumb to the greed and cultured indifference of the "winners". And if love was only a command then perhaps we might as well.

But love is also a promise. It is a promise that undergirds every step of love we take. It provides the strength for love and it provides the meaning for love. When we stand on tip toes and peer over the horizon of the future and we catch sight of the all-embracing reign of love coming dancing towards us, then love makes sense.

Then even our most faltering efforts at love have a context that fills them with hope because every act of love becomes a prophetic protest against cynicism and despair and a courageous proclamation of the good news of

the dawning reign of love. No wonder Jesus said love was the greatest commandment of them all.

So hear this as people of God. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. And you will love your neighbour as yourself. You will. You really will!

Thanks be to God.

HYMN 129 Amazing grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4zGRGHe4tY>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God is God, and we are not. These gifts we bring to honour our Holy One, seeking love for and with our neighbours.

Holy One, please accept the gifts
we offer in money, time, and love,
as we seek to honour you
by nurturing life for all. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy One, help us to see how to love,
our neighbours and ourselves.

We love and honour you with our love for each other.

We see our neighbours who are in pain,
the injured after accident or abuse,
the isolated through illness or incapacity,
the grieving for loved ones and lost opportunities.

Help us to see how to love
our hurting neighbours and our hurting selves.

We love and honour you with our love for each other.

We see our neighbours who are in need,
poor through lack of education and employment,
dying without access to medicine and health care,
homeless after war, famine, unemployment.

Help us to see how to love

our neighbours in need and ourselves in our need.

We love and honour you with our love for each other.

We see our non-human neighbours,

trees felled

wildlife homeless

game hunted

fish suffocating

bees starving.

Help us to see how to love

the Earth and all you have created.

We love and honour you with our love for each other.

We see – help us to see more clearly,

and to respond with love enacted.

We love and honour you with our love for each other. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 588 In heavenly love abiding

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sT0r9DaGbmQ>

BENEDICTION

Honour Holy One, your God,

with all you are, with all you have,

with all you do, with all your love.

And may you know the love

of Holy One, Holy Three,

faithful to you, with you, and through you,

always. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74