



Love One Another

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Year B, Easter 6

Acts 10:44-48; John 15: 9-17

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The season of Easter continues this sixth Sunday of Easter today. A season of resurrection proving encounters and image generation, to assure us of, perhaps ensure Jesus' continuance. The images of shepherd, of vine, are bound into the fabric of life, of the world of Jesus followers, just as Jesus is. In our world we are, for the most part, distanced from such images – perhaps if we were stock farmers or viticulturists it would be different. Assuming we still think God encounter in the ordinariness of life is a possibility, what might that look like?

A week or three ago I was out by the compost hub, chatting to Kevin and Gregory as they were processing the compost. A chap wearing a high-vis vest came by and engaged me in conversation. "All this land here," he said, pointing up the hill toward the carpark, "all this land, it should be producing food. It should be growing food to feed people, it's a waste having it just like it is." I pointed out that there was food being grown on the Wellesley Street side of the site. "Mm mmm," he said, "but there is so much more that could be grown here, cabbages, broccoli, those sorts of vegetables. Land should be used to feed people not just sit like this, it's a waste." I couldn't help but agree while being a little perplexed as to how this would happen and whether the site was suitable. He was an older Maori guy, so I wondered whether he knew more than I did about the conditions needed to grow such crops. As the conversation continued, he told me he came up each Wednesday to buy a bag of vegetables from the Mission space on Federal Street. "We have a

dinner at Ellen Melville each Wednesday night, you should come and join us," he said. "I come and buy a bag of vegetables from here each week to give to the people who make the kai, it's important to make sure everyone gets a good feed and it's something I can give to help." We chatted on for a while. He then said to me, "You should come and visit me at my place some time." "Oh, ok," I responded somewhat hesitantly, "where is your place?" "Oh, I'm down on Queen Street, my place is between Darby Street and Victoria Street, one of the doorways down there, you're welcome anytime." Not quite what I expected! Generosity, hospitality, care for the people who had not enough, him taking his place, his part in caring, looking for ways to change the way things are with the resources that he has and that he sees around him. Not to idealise him, but in a curious way he was a revelation, a Christ presence moment in an unexpected way.

Today's gospel is about love, living on in Jesus' love. To love one another as Jesus has loved us. Of being chosen not choosing. Chosen to make this love real to bear fruit that will endure. And yes, Richard, it includes the quote that proliferates on ANZAC memorials "there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."

The command Jesus gives, leaves us with today, is to love one another. How many of us know what that means?

Some years ago, when preaching about Jesus, (as I remember of my discombobulation when people spoke with great certainty about knowing who Jesus was), I proposed that when the name Jesus was spoken, there was a Jesus present for every person in the room. For every one of us has our own version, and quite a few may have nothing spring to mind. We speak in the singular; we hear in the singular and each of us brings our singular to our collective. I'm not sure we talk much about the specifics of it with one another. I think we gloss over, we're all in this place and we identify with the Christian lineage, so we must be on some sort of same page. Maybe, kind of enough, to not probe and to get along.

I wonder if it's the same with the 'love one another' command. If we can get anywhere near defining love, scraping off the overlay of romanticism that's attached itself like a barnacle, what are we left with? In each of us some response will arise, maybe something hard to pin down too exactly with words.

However that is, it will be shaped and known through, by, from our own experience, by our life thus far. Inevitably we apply the understanding from our experience to the command to love one another. We seek to apply this loving one another as best we can, given who we are, place, time and context. Some days are better than others.

Because we're human, we're enculturated; we bring with us, even to loving, expectations and judgements. Of what love looks like when it's being done, of how things will play out for the good, and, quite likely, how much the one we love should thank us for being such a loving person. And of how the behaviour of the one loved will come to fit within the norms of the encultured paradigm we, subconsciously, have applied to the situation.

I suspect the 'love' in the 'love one another' command has an implicit unconditional clause in it. This may seem impossible. If we think we can do it ourselves, from our conditioned thinking and habits, it will be.

To unlearn our colonizing ways, we need to learn from those unlike us. From those we feel the call to love, those we perceive to need our love and a share of our abundance.

Another person I've come to know over time, beautiful and broken, caring and dangerously unpredictable, never quite sure which one I'll meet, sat with me a while ago. Housed after long term street living, trained and gained employment - from a certain way of measuring, life was on track, as it should be. But gradually the lustre had faded. Somewhere between their inner identity and previous life, the experience of being housed became unbearable for them. Now they'd returned to living under a bridge. I'm still not

sure exactly which one, it's a part of Auckland's cityscape I'm still to learn.

Employment had also ceased. Weeping, their perception was that being employed, even in a role that advocated for people who lived on the margins, had distanced them from the real. They'd stopped seeing how it was for their people who society had discarded; they'd ceased to see what was really going on. Again - not to idealise.

But the tears and the grief and the pain were real – as was the question asked, demanded through angry snot and tears, with a thumb directed towards this church, “what are you doing? Comfortable inside your walls, you're just part of the system, where is your voice while all this is happening around you, where is this God you talk about who cares?”

My best response, my only response, was silence, struck by the truth in what was said. We sat together as tears flowed, after a time we embraced and parted, I think still in relationship. Somewhat in disarray, with my head spinning, as you may guess I'm still processing.

The command is to love and the gift given us is to know we're chosen and are now friends. One of the things about being chosen and being called friend, is we're now called **with** knowing to go and bear fruit that will endure. A story quite famous within social justice circles goes something like this ... As slaves we may be OK attending to the resulting needs, but as friends we're called to be more curious, to look to the causes of such need. We're to be agents of transformation in the world. The incredible graciousness, empowerment, and compassion that came into our world in Jesus is still, at least potentially so, in our world in us, a collective who gather in Jesus' name. What Jesus did we can do too; in fact, that is precisely what we are asked to do.