

## **Limits on Love**

Acts 10:44-end; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

*Love one another as I have loved you.  
[John 15:12]*

Christians should be recognised as Christians because of their capacity for love. There is no way round it, no way to escape it and no way to avoid it!

The difficulty is that all of us (if we are honest) want to know where we can draw the line - we're happy to love just so long as we know who and when we don't have to love!

In Acts we encounter the usual nonsense - surely we can be excused loving those outside our community, discovering **the limits of who we love**.

Can't you just hear the early Church complaining? What was Peter thinking of going to the Gentiles? Why was he preaching to them? How could God give the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles?

Surely everyone knows that Jesus was a Jew and so the *Good News* belongs to the Jews!

(The irregularity of Christians showing they were God's by using the gifts of the Holy Spirit was for a reason - so that Peter, the Apostle of the Jerusalem Church, had to be the preacher and had to baptise them so that they were on an equal footing with all other Christians)

Churches can be really difficult places - the paradox is that the more loving a Church is the more difficult it is for new people to fit in.

- \* We want to grow - but we want to stay the same.
- \* We want new people - but we want the new people to be the same as us.
- \* We want people to love us for who we are - but we often want to love others for the people they will become.

Love isn't love if it is limited - we choose to love, but not who we love!

The second area highlighted in the readings is **the limits of how we love**.

Laying down life for a friend is challenging as is bearing fruit. Those are the boundaries we have to push beyond. But when the rubber of faith hits the road of reality what does that mean?

- \* **As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.** As we look at the cross, as we take bread and wine, are the limits clear? We have to love what Jesus loved and love as Jesus loves.
- \* Do we love each other enough to forgive each other? The hyperbole of **laying down our life** (unless we are Christians in Syria) is easy. It is the practical love that recognises that we have been forgiven and so we have no right to withhold forgiveness from others.
- \* Do we love each other enough to make the transition to being friends? That's what Jesus says: **I do not call you servants any longer... I have called you friends.** Loving each other for who we are rather than our usefulness. Loving each other enough to spend time together - worship is taking time to love God and each other at the same time!

Love isn't a feeling but a choice!

There is a story told of a man, a peasant in an Indian village, who wanted to impress. He proclaimed 'If I had two houses, I only need one: I would keep one and give the other to someone in need'. Those listening responded positively, so he continued. 'If I had two fields, I would keep the one and give the other away'. The response was more positive, so he continued. 'If I had two goats, I only have need of one, so I would keep one and give the other away'. So impressed were the crowd that one of them shouted out, 'What if you had two chickens?' The man fell silent. Eventually he said, 'Ah, that's different! You see, I have two chickens!'

Love is only love when it is practical!