

John 15:9-17

“Part of the team”

Jesus says, "My commandment is this: love one another just as I love you." Talking about Jesus and love in the same sentence is so familiar to us that we are in danger of not hearing the full implications of what Jesus is saying. On the surface, this sounds like a nice, neat, simple "recipe" for living as a Christian. Of course, we should love one another. Isn't that what we've been doing all our lives? We're good people – we care about one another. We live love, everyday.

Or do we? Do we love - all - as though they are precious creations of God's and therefore holy, sacred. Do we love the unlovables, the unlovely, those with whom we disagree or compete for jobs and popularity and friends? Do we love people who live a very different lifestyle from ours? What is this thing called love?

Jesus continually welcomed and included those rejected as unclean, and sinners. We know how much trouble that got him into. It was this very inclusion that seemed to rankle the religious authorities the most, and which they tried to use to discredit his ministry.

Jesus commands us to love. How can one command "love"? It might help for us to remember that in the Greek language there are a number of words for love - eros, philia, agape ... The word used here, in the Greek, is agape, and it is not so much a feeling as an attitude that can be decided upon, practised, cultivated and put into action. For example, agape doesn't mean liking. Even if we don't particularly like someone, we can pray for them, their happiness, their well being and their soul as passionately, as sincerely and as often as we pray for our own. With agape, we are not to let our liking or not liking someone stand in the way of our doing everything for them that we possibly can.

Jesus commands us to love. Why? Why would he demand this thing of us and name it to be the single most important commandment of our lives. Perhaps an illustration ... In the old days thick, high walls were built around the biggest and best cities. When enemy armies approached, the people closed the gates and hid behind the walls. It's been many centuries since we have seen walled cities like the ones of olden days. The reason is they didn't really work. There were several problems with them. One problem was that once the wall was built, the city could no longer grow. A second was that when the people pulled back behind their walls, it was true the enemies couldn't get to them. But nothing else could either. The armies simply camped around the city and waited until the people inside ran out of food and water.

Jesus knew, as we know, when we think about it, that people who don't love other people are like those walled cities. They are closed in on themselves. They can't grow. And they eventually starve for the things they need the most.

Jesus tells us that if we break down the walls we have put up around us, we will be



happier people - hence the command, love one another.

"Love one another." The important thing to remember is that while we cannot command our feelings, if we would follow Jesus, we must command our actions. The command is to act lovingly. It's not a suggestion that we can take or leave. Jesus said, "A new command I give to you, that you love one another. ... you are my friends, if you love one another."

What a concept that is - friend of Jesus! Did you notice the natural implication of what Jesus is saying. "If you love one another, you are my friends ... if you don't, you can't be!"

William Barclay talks about what it means to be chosen by Jesus - tremendous privilege to be considered by Jesus to be his friends, his partners. Barclay says, Jesus chose us to experience the joy and wonder and love of being his friends, and Jesus chose us to be part of the team - to be his ambassador, to represent him in and to the world; to be his advertisement - Jesus said that we are to go and bear fruit - to win people to his community of faith - to win them by attracting them - to win them because they see in us how wonderful it is to be friends of Jesus.

This morning, we have been given a radical yardstick to measure the depth and breadth of our commitment, our dedication to Jesus. We have a specific definition of what being a Christian and of what being a community of faith mean. Bearing the name of Jesus means loving not only God but others – all others.

The disciples of Jesus were stretched to understand, in a deeper way than they had understood before, what it would mean to be part of the community of faith, to be followers of Jesus. He said, "I command you to do this." Like them, we are not to dilute the command to what we think we can do. Jesus says, "Do it. Stop waffling. Stop asking questions. Do it."