

The words of John's Gospel we heard this morning spoken by Jesus are the continuation from last week. Words of that final conversation Jesus had with his disciples in the Upper Room. He has a lot to say, and this is his last opportunity to say it. And as we can expect, his focus remains on the disciples – and not on himself. He faces his death as he lived his life. With his eye, his heart, on them. On us.

This section of John's Gospel is known as "The Farewell Discourses." For Jesus' Last Lecture he focuses on love and the Spirit.

Love one another as I have loved you. and  
The Spirit of Truth will abide with you when I am gone.

Love is an interesting factor to be commanded to do - you will love! - rather love when it feels right, when it pleases you.

Jesus knows deeply and personally how when it doesn't suit us, we don't, won't. And as a result of his knowing, Jesus adds a promise to his love command.

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,  
to be with you forever.

We don't have to love all by ourselves. We don't have to do the impossible on our own. Jesus's desire is not that we wear ourselves out, trying to conjure love from our own meager resources.

This promise of the Advocate is God's own Spirit, God's own heart, living within us. This Spirit, Jesus promises us, will be in us, making possible the startling, counter-intuitive obedience which is love.

This Spirit will abide within and among us, creating holy places where authentic, self-sacrificial human love can take root and flourish.

The Spirit's resources are inexhaustible.

Long after our natural stores are depleted, the Spirit of God will love in, among, and through us.

There at the table, in his final words for them, Jesus says the same things over and over in different ways. The central word is love.

Everything we say and do and are as believers in Christ comes down to loving. Prayer, evangelism, repentance, generosity, asking, seeking, alms-giving, truth-telling, honouring, studying, serving, feeding, sharing ... all of it, in the end, comes down to love.

So, the essential question for every congregation is this:

Do we love one another as Jesus has loved us? Or do we not?

Easy to ask yet not always easy to answer ... for all times with all people.

Anticipating our answer New Testament scholar D.A Carson states

This new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, and yet it is profound enough that the most mature believers are

repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice.

Practice is the only way ... an effective way to comprehend what this love does for us as much as for anyone else – into love.

Want the best for another – one at a time - whether we like or love them or not.

Wish them well.

And you will comprehend love is not an action that we do.

Love is what we are. Who we are.

Love is a place that already exists inside us.

It is a place we must learn to go to, which is within us and bigger than us at the same time.

That's the paradox. It's within us and yet beyond us.

Jesus was not asking the disciples to hold up his life as a memory but as a presence.

And we are asked the same. I find Richard Rohr's discernment in this very helpful

Love is not something you can buy, nor something you can attain or work up to, because you already have it, it is your deepest identity.

It is quite simply the presence of God within you. Our word for that has been the Holy Spirit, uncreated grace, or the divine indwelling. God always loves and is forever united to this love within you. It is this that God sees in you, loves in you, and cannot reject.

You see, God sees the divine in us. God sees love in us.

We just need to allow ourselves to also see.

God and love is in us.

This being our deepest identity.

*Wendy*