



22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



Sunday 29 October 2023

READINGS

Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Psalm 90:1-6,13-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46

Do small things with great love.

Communication with a capital "C" is big business these days. Communication is key in creating human connection. Today's world is highly driven by technological advancements that allow us to be more connected than ever. I can't even begin to think how many satellites there are now zooming around us which make available probably billions more phone calls, innumerable TV channels never mind internet and global positioning and I think the cost would be in the trillions now.

Communication is the most important part of our day-to-day lives. Whether it's for business or personal reasons, communication is often at the top of our priority list. The bible consists of a variety of ways: stories, parables, poems, wise sayings etc. of communicating the story of God's relationship with humanity. The readings for today could be described as "Love unlimited" - the love that Jesus lived out in his life, the love that he demonstrated with his death and the love that he gave to us through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus is in conversation with the two leading religious communities of the day: the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Last week we heard how the Pharisees and the Herodian - got together and tried to find fault with Jesus asking a question about taxes paid to Caesar. Jesus passed that test with flying colours! In the passage before today's gospel reading - we read about how Jesus has already embarrassed the Sadducees who had challenged him with a silly question about who is married to whom in the afterlife. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection.

Today we see another test. The Pharisees sends one of their finest students of the law - After learning that the Sadducees were not able to buzz Jesus with their own questions - their lawyer ask Jesus - Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" The Jews had a figure of 613 laws. So he asked Jesus, "Out of all the commandments in the Law, which is the great one? Jesus knowing that they were testing him, without hesitation, says: - "The greatest commandment? Love God. And coming in at a close second is love your neighbour as yourself."

These were times when the people were suffering under the weight of heavy burdens. The upper class were existing on the backs of the poor. The religious leaders and teachers of the law have become intertwined with the powers that be – in ways that left them compromise. Jesus is angry that the religious leaders – the ones that was supposed to take care of God's people - are using their power to put unnecessary burdens on the people and in doing so they are neglecting to love. And they are doing this in

the name of their love for God. Jesus is saying that to love God is to love others and to love others is to love God. All of the law and prophets depend on, these two commandments. In other words, if we are not loving others then we are not loving God. Love matters more than laws. Love matters more than rules. If the law prevents us from loving someone, then the law needs to be re-examined and perhaps re-interpreted. Jesus wants to make it understood that you may do many good things, fulfil many precepts, many good things, but if you do not have love, this serves no purpose.

Jesus' answer sends the Pharisees in a huddle – and while they are processing this – Jesus goes before them - asking them the question – whose son is the Messiah. Without much hesitation they say David. But Jesus ask them how can this be and Jesus questions them– if David himself names him Lord. How can the Messiah be both David son and his Lord. The Pharisees are baffled because they know Jesus is quoting scripture – and we are told after this – they question him no more. There is more going on in this interaction than Jesus highlighting the importance of love. Jesus is taking laws that would have been known by both the Sadducees and Pharisees: To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and all your mind.

What Jesus said is not new. He's referring them to what they were familiar with. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might – that would have been found in the book of Deuteronomy – known to them as the Shema. To love your neighbour as yourself – was not new either – it comes from Leviticus 19:18. These were scriptures that would have been known to them. Jesus was not teaching them something they did not know. The greatest commandment that Jesus mentions is love – was something they knew in their minds – for it was part of their law. And Jesus lived his life precisely in this way: preaching and practising what truly matters and is essential, namely, love. Love gives impulse and fruitfulness to life and to the journey of life: without love, both life and faith remain sterile.

What does it mean for us to love God, love neighbour and love self in today's day and age? We have to recognise that there is a possibility that we need to be re-introduce to Jesus – in ways that people had to be re-introduce in Jesus' day. We need to sit with the reality that there is enough love for the world and ask ourselves how we can become better stewards of distributing that love. Jesus on the cross demonstrates for us love that is willing to bleed for the sake of others. Risks all for the sake of others.

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” I have always been struck by the simple wisdom of Mother Teresa. As a young woman, she decided to do “small things” by picking up a bucket of water and a bar of soap and caring for the poor in the streets of Calcutta, India. Her small act of great love created a ripple effect, not only in India, but throughout the world, and she is known as one of the greatest examples of Christian charity in the twentieth century.

As followers of Jesus – we have been given the opportunity to do our small part in sharing Christ's great love.

AMEN