**Reading and Reflection 25th October 2020**

**Reading Matthew 22.34-46**

34When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ 37He said to him, ‘“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” 38This is the greatest and first commandment. 39And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” 40On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’ 41Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: 42‘What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?’ They said to him, ‘The son of David.’ 43He said to them, ‘How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,
 44“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand,
 until I put your enemies under your feet’”?
45If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?’ 46No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

**Reflection**

Love is the law of Jesus. Love is the very core of his being and the frame upon which the world was created and filled with creatures beyond our imagining. Love marks him out as the son of God. Here we see the Pharisees struggle to make sense of what they see and hear, and how these impacts on their faith.

I often find myself making some big assumptions. Expecting something to be common knowledge when it is not. Thinking others must think like me. Not recognising that we do not all share the same experiences. For example, I am truly bewildered that there are people who like to eat pizza. Why?! It is so gross and slimy oily and disgusting! I like cheese and tomato sandwiches, and cheese and tomato on toast, why spoil it by making these fine ingredients into a pizza? But you know what – there are very few people who feel like me on this! So, I have to school myself to remember pizza is a treat for many folk and being invited to a pizza party is not meant to be a punishment!

We can assume that people in church know all about love. Loving God, loving our neighbours, loving ourselves. But actually, I am not so sure this is true. I think people in church know that they should, they can love, but are struggling to see how they can do it, pretty much like anyone else. The difference is that Christians are reminded in our reading the scriptures, in our prayers and in our experiences with God that love is the basis of our life in this world and the next.

The scary thing is that those who are outside of the church also know that Christians are meant to be people of love, and some judge us, and God, by the actions of those who do not live according to the law of love. Very often I am told that “so and so’s actions” mean that they cannot come to church because of the “hypocrisy of the members.”

Metropolitan Anthony, the former leaders of the Eastern Orthodox church wrote that “the church is a school of love” but it is a school, a place of learning.

Jesus showed love as a total commitment to wanting the best for another regardless of the cost. His life reminded us that the physical, mental, and emotional health of the individual all warranted the focused attention of the Lord of All Life. He healed, he called, he challenged, and he cast out demons, but over all this he loved people, and he loved God. Then he calls us to follow him, to live like he did, to become Christlike.

No wonder we need the church to be a school of love, for this sort of costly loving is not easy. Do we really find ourselves being perfect lovers? Or do we slip up, and perhaps find it challenging to love some of the people around us, or hard to love ourselves? Or at times when prayer is empty, hard to love God? Metropolitan Anthony only said the church was a school of love, but I know that some places of learning are universities, and others are preschools where sharing is a foreign concept at the start! Some people fly through school absorbing learning and hungry for more, others are day dreamers who waft around school on some other planet, and then there are those who really want to be anywhere else on earth than in school.

If the church really is a school of love, where do you fit in? Are you a scared pre-schooler or a graduate with honours? Are you still learning and practicing your loving like those who practised handwriting, or have you given up learning?

Love the Lord your God with all your soul (heart), with all your mind, with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these. On these two commandments lie all the life ahead of you in this world and the next, on these two commandments hang the mission and future of the church, and of the community around you. On these hang the future of our planet and our children. Love does not wear out, go, and learn the life of love, live the life of love, and God’s kingdom will be near.

**Prayers by Carrie Snaden**

Out of over 600 commandments in Jewish Law, Jesus gave priority to: love God with your whole heart and soul; and love your neighbour as yourself. We cannot love God and refuse to love everyone not just neighbours or people from our own race, religion or family. Father, thank You for loving us despite how we sometimes act or think. Thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with Your love and help us to share love with others.

Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Lord, help us to be patient and kind instead of jealous, boastful, proud or rude. Help us to be considerate of others and their opinions. Help us to be joyful, quick to forgive and to move on instead of keeping a record of being wronged. Help us to not return evil with evil. Help us to shine a light so that people see our good works done in your glory, Father.

 Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Almighty God, we pray for your Church; the Clergy; for Readers and Lay Ministers; for Churchwardens and PCCs; that they will know how to strike the right balance between their work and family lives. We pray that You will give them courage when they need to resist being controlled by others, and will teach them to take control with understanding, always reflecting the love of Your Son, Jesus Christ.
Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Gracious God, we pray for the ill, the lonely and distressed especially those tormented by fear arising from the Global Pandemic. We pray for healing and wholeness in their lives. Lord, help us to know what to say and when to speak. May we always be ready to give practical help whenever we can and to ensure that those on their own are able to manage and cope with the day-to-day life. We pray for all those treating the effects of Covid-19 and those working to find a cure. (add names of those requesting prayers)

Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Merciful God, when death separates us from those we love and we find it hard to live without them, take from us all bitterness and resentment and help us to remember that death has no power at all over the peace you give and the love we shared with the departed goes beyond the grave. *(add names)*

Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Holy Spirit, show us how to truly love the Father with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. Reveal to us those habits, mindsets and attitudes that prevent us from being truly surrendered to the Father. Help us to not deceive ourselves by thinking we are walking in love while using our tongues cruelly towards others. In this world, where we are told to put ourselves first, help us to truly put the Father first in our lives, and to regard others more than ourselves.

Merciful Father: Accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen