

## Sermon 6 May 2018

### John 15:9-17

This passage follows on immediately from the passage we looked at last week concerning the vine and how Jesus compared himself to a true vine. There is a strong link between the two passages, which hopefully will become apparent.

It is a passage which re-emphasizes the foundational message of love. Everything always comes back to that one word, 'love'. In order to understand Jesus's revelation of God, to understand the nature of God as given to us by Jesus, we need to continue to unpack and explore this word 'love'. This passage contributes to that exploration.

Let's begin with the verse, 'I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow'. I don't want to spend too much time on this idea of joy. Sometime in the not too distant future I am hoping to do a series of sermons looking at spiritual disciplines. 'Joy' will be one of the first. Let me just say this, all too often Christians are seen as rather serious, rather dull, rather gloomy, focusing on the negative instead of the positive. And there is some justification for that impression. Sometimes we really are our own worst enemies. To be filled with God's love is something to be really happy about. To spread God's love is something which should bring us heaps of joy.

Let's move on to the verse, 'The greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends.' We have talked about this before. Yes, there are many who have been called upon to literally give their lives for others, to make that ultimate sacrifice, but for you and I, I think it just means to give our lives over to the Christian ethic of being prepared to make sacrifices on the behalf of others.

Sacrifice is a very interesting word. It originates from the Latin *sacer*, which means 'sacred or holy', and *facio*, which means 'to make.' So to make a sacrifice is to do something sacred or holy.

There is the story of a young couple, Della and Jim, who were very poor but very much in love. Each had a unique possession. Della's hair was her glory, very, very long and quite beautiful. Jim had a gold watch, which had come to him from his father and was his pride. It was the day before Christmas, and Della had exactly one dollar, eighty-seven cents to buy Jim a present. She went out and had her beautiful hair cut off and sold it for twenty dollars, and with the proceeds she bought a platinum locket for Jim's watch.

When Jim came home that night and saw Della's shorn head, he stopped in his tracks. It was not that he did not like it or love her any less, for she was as lovely as ever. Slowly he handed her his gift. It was a set of expensive tortoise shell combs for her lovely hair – and he had sold his gold watch to buy them. They had both made a sacrifice, and both were sacred expressions of love.

I could go on and on talking about sacrifice, and it is something that will continue to crop up as it really does lie at the heart of love as applied in the Christian context.

Let's finish with the last two verses in this passage, 'I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. I command you to love one another.'

I told you there was a strong link with the passage of the vine. Well, there it is. It is interesting that Jesus in the one breath urges his disciples to 'produce fruit that will last,' in other words to be productive, and in the next breath to 'love one another.' We can only take from that that it is in loving one another that we are productive. Love produces results, love changes, love is transforming. Let me finish with another story.

There was once a young girl who was always told off at home. Whatever she did, she was criticized. Nothing could please her parents and they often seemed quite angry with her. Never did they praise her. Never did they show any love towards her. The girl felt ugly, she developed asthma and eczema. Later still she went into a psychiatric hospital because she was depressed and felt useless. It seemed

no one could make her better.

One day a hospital orderly noticed that beneath her sad face was a beautiful woman. When he talked to her she was intelligent and interesting. Soon he formed a relationship with her having deep conversations with her and praising the artwork she did. At this she seemed to glow. The orderly got permission to take her out on the occasional Saturday. It wasn't long before he was telling her that he loved her. Once she knew that she was loved she began to smile. When she smiled she blossomed. She began to feel good about herself. Soon her asthma and eczema disappeared. There was a new peace and joy in her life. In the end they married and she became a very good artist. This all came about because of the transforming power of love.

Never underestimate what you can achieve by showing someone that you care, that you appreciate them, that you value them. That is the power of love.