

Sunday 13th May 2012		Easter 5 - Year B
Cathedral, Grahamstown		
730 & 9.30 a.m.		
Gen 35:9-15	Ps 101	Acts 10:44-48 / 1 John 5:1-6
		John 15:9-17
Love one another		

BODY – Greetings & Introduction

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (Jn 15:12)

In the opening lines of the film *Love Actually*, Hugh Grant says, “Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow airport. General opinion is starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed. But I don’t see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere. Often it’s not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it’s always there. Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, as far as I know, none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge. They were all messages of love. If you look for it, I’ve got a sneaky feeling you’ll find that love actually ... is ... all around.”

The film then tells the stories of a marriage that is saved and restored; a Prime Minister who falls in love with a member of his staff; a writer who learns Portuguese to express his love for the young woman who worked for him; and the friendship between a fading pop star and his manager.

1st POINT – Love

Love is one of the most powerful forces that we know. Today is Mother’s Day – and so we affirm and acknowledge all our mothers, as

well as all who play a mothering role in the lives of others – aunts, grandmothers, godmothers - and we thank you for your love. Then we have the classic love story – boy meets girl, they fall in love and live happily ever after. Of course it is seldom as simple as that, as the play *Romeo and Juliet* shows us – two young people from opposing families who come to love one another in the face of the strongest opposition from their respective families; the story ends in tragedy but also with the triumph of love. Or the film *Titanic* – not only the sinking of the great ship, but also the story of a young girl who falls in love and chooses to live her own life, free from the stereo-typed path laid out for her by society. But her hero dies in the icy water soon after the *Titanic* sinks and she has to make her way on her own.

None of us would be here today without acts of love and kindness and care and nurture – from parents, family, friends. We are shaped and strengthened by love, just as we can be shaped and distorted and scarred by hatred and abuse and violence and cruelty. But we can also be healed by love.

2nd POINT – Love one another as I have loved you

Our Gospel reading – words of Jesus to his disciples the night of his betrayal, the night of his arrest, the night before he was crucified. Yet his words are not words of fear or terror or hatred. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (Jn 15:12) Earlier that evening, he gave them a new commandment: “love one another... by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13:34-35).

The love of God is at the heart of the Gospel. “God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not die, but have everlasting life.” (Jn 3:16) “But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8). One of the most powerful symbols of love is the cross of Christ – the cross which was an instrument of torture and cruelty and suffering and

death, but also became a symbol and sign of love – the love of God for the world. Christ died for you and for me and for the whole world. He gave his life so that we might have life. “He used his servant body to carry our sins to the Cross so that we could be rid of sin, free to live the right way. His wounds became your healing.” (1 Pet 2:24 – *The Message*). You and I are deeply, wonderfully held in the love of God.

3rd POINT – Love creates a future

So when we hear the words of Jesus – to love one another as I have loved you – that’s radical. It means giving our lives for one another, being willing to offer up all that we are so that those we love may have life.

But actually, it happens all the time. On Mother’s Day we give thanks for the love of mothers, and fathers – parents who have given their lives so that their children may have life. I think of a young mother, raising her three children on her own – who scrimped and saved so that her children would have the opportunities that she never had. I think of a young father, a former soldier, who has spent the last few years in the Middle East with a security company, doing what he has to do, to earn the money to put his son through university.

But there is more to it. God’s love creates a future, creates a new reality. This radical love pushes us out of our comfort zones, pushes us over the boundaries, to love and heal. When we realise that we are loved, we are set free to love others with the same love.

That’s the point of the reading from the book of Acts – the Pentecost of the Gentiles – as the early church realised that God’s love was much broader, wider, than only the Jews. The tent of God’s love, the boundaries, are much wider than we imagine.

God’s love pushes us out of our little bubbles, our group of like-minded people, to discover and embrace and love brothers and sisters in Christ who are very different from us. That is why the church is

such a remarkable mixture. God's love binds us together and creates a future, a new reality.

There are many forces that drive us. Hatred. Anger. The desire for revenge. The longing to succeed, to be rich, to be powerful. But it is love that heals. It is love that creates a future. It is love that brings people together. It is love that transforms society.

It is love that opens our eyes to the homeless, or the unemployed, or the victims of abuse. It is love that helps us reach out to the lonely, those who are excluded, or rejected, those without friends. It is love that makes us aware of the dangers of cyberspace bullying – using BBM and Facebook to anonymously malign and badmouth others. It is love that says to gays and lesbians, “You are welcome.” It is love that brought a group of St Andrew's boys onto Church Square last year, to spend the night outside – to see what it is like for those who have only cardboard as a shelter. It is love that sends Rhodes students to help out in local township schools with reading and tuition. It is love that inspires teachers to go the extra mile and to do what is best for their pupils and their schools.

And, on a broader level, it is love that says – stop fracking with our Karoo; it is love that brings Israelis and Palestinians together to find a common future. It is love that causes Christians to stand against corruption. And it is love that when the fighting is done helps us make peace.

CONCLUSION

Let's love one another as Christ has loved us.