

Sunday 10th May 2015 St Francis Mdantsane 9 a.m.		Easter 5 - Year B Mothers' Day
Acts 10:44-48	Ps 98	1 John 5:1-6
		John 15:9-17
Love creates a future		

BODY – Greetings & Introduction

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them. And you are my friends if you do what I command you.”
(Jn 15:12-14)

Greetings to Archdeacon Penrose Mpumlwana and his wife Lungiswa; Revd Vuyiswa Jela; Deacons Revd Mkaulele Kuse and Revd Jeanette Faniso and their families; churchwardens: Mr Sonwabo Mdubi, Mrs Vuyokazi Matshaya (in absentia); Ms Lindiwe Mabele (alternate); parish councillors, lay ministers, leaders of our various guilds; our mothers and fathers; young people and children; all the people of God here at St Francis: I greet you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

I bring you special greetings from Bishop Ebenezer and mama Noncedo; members of the Cathedral Chapter. I am here at the request and direction of the Bishop; I represent the Bishop and Chapter here today.

Easter tide

We are in the Fifty Great Days of Easter: these weeks from Easter Day until Pentecost, during which we celebrate the reality that Jesus has risen, that the Risen Christ is amongst us, that Jesus has won the victory over sin and evil and death.

But the resurrection is not simply something that happened then. Sunday by Sunday, during these Fifty Great Days, our scripture readings help us to appreciate and grasp the different ways in which the Risen Christ meets with us now.

Let's remind ourselves of our journey through Eastertide so far.

The Gospel readings for the first three Sundays of Easter bring us encounters between the Risen Lord and those who knew him:

Easter I - Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden;

Easter II - Thomas the apostle, who at first refuses to believe, but then sees and touches the wounds of Christ and responds with faith and trust – “My Lord and my God”;

Easter III - The Emmaus Road encounter when the disciples recognise Jesus as he breaks the bread, and as they share a meal together.

Easter IV, V and VI focus on the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ, now our risen and victorious Lord:

Easter IV - Jesus the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep – his ongoing presence with us, his ministry to us as our shepherd, the one who leads and guides us.

Easter V - Jesus as the vine, and reminds us of the need to abide, to remain, to dwell in Jesus; to be united with him (Jn 15:1-8)

Easter VI - The commandment to love one another, just as the Lord loves us (Jn 15:9-17)

Love is one of the most powerful forces that we know – ask any teenager or young person just how important love is in their lives. But love is bigger than romantic love, or erotic love, the love of the movie stars, the love that seems so self-centred, love that is very close to

jealousy, love that leads to family killings. How many times have we seen the news headlines: “Boyfriend kills his ex-girl-friend”? Is that love? Or something else? Love, says Jesus in the Gospel, means giving, not taking. True love is not centred on me, my needs, what I want, but rather on the other and their needs.

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 – aunties, grandmothers, godmothers - and we thank you for your love.

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.

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. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them.” (Jn 15:12f.)

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. “Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. It is by his wounds that you have been healed.” 1 Pet 2:24 – *Good News Bible*). You and I are deeply, wonderfully held in the love of God.

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 – because love creates a future.

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 look around at parents, grandparents, and see the sacrifices that are made each day, for their children and grandchildren – because love creates a future.

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 – because love creates a future.

That’s the point of today’s 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 – because love creates a future.

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 brings people together. It is love that transforms society. It is love that creates a future.

It is love that seeks to bring healing in the face of great hurt. It is love that tries to reconcile with enemies. It is love that holds us together even when we are very angry with one another. It is love that finds a way forward, a way to make peace, in times of conflict. It is love that calls us to behave with courtesy and respect for one another – because love creates a future.

One of the hardest times in the life of any parish, any church, is where there is conflict. None of us like conflict. None of us enjoy it. None of us are happy when there is a quarrel. I acknowledge the anger and the hurt and the breakdown of trust that has happened here at St Francis.

What happened last Sunday, when the service was interrupted and in the end cancelled, is not acceptable. That is not how we behave as Christians, as Anglicans. We do not disrupt worship in that way. I spent several hours here on Tuesday evening, meeting with the Parish Council, and then with a concerned group, to hear what is going on. And I am here today at the request of the Bishop to continue with the process, to find the way forward – because love creates a future.

I ask for three things from you all.

1. Please pray for your parish leadership – rector and clergy, churchwardens and parish council; for the Pastoral Committee that will work with them; and for me as I chair and steer this process.

2. Please respect and honour the process that the Bishop has instructed me to follow here with you all. Like any structure or organisation or place of work, the church has its processes for discipline, for dealing with complaints, for addressing conflict. We have our Pastoral Standards, our code of conduct. We have our commitment to good governance and transparency. We have our Canons and Acts to guide us as parishes and as a diocese, and which we must follow. We shall get no-where if people are not prepared to follow and to respect our processes.

A number of allegations and concerns were raised with me on Tuesday evening. If these have not yet been brought to the Parish Council, then please do so, in writing, as soon as possible, so that they can be addressed by the Parish Council together with the Pastoral team mandated by the Bishop.

3. Let's trust God, the Lord, to lead us through.

CONCLUSION

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