

Sermon for Trinity 2 2020

³⁷ He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 10.37-39

Or, as John presents the similar theme: ¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants,^[a] for the servant^[a] does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends." John 15.12-15

It is not unusual for us to speak of our first love. There is usually someone, or something, that we love above all others. I have favourite tools in my workshop. I have favourite books on my bookshelves. I have a beautiful wife, gorgeous children and the most divine grandchildren. I love them dearly, and I love them equally. I love them even when they ask tricky questions. The latest question comes from my youngest grandchild. Jasper is 6 and he asks, "Does God wear socks, and what size feet does he have?"

I did answer as best I could. Why did I answer? Because I love him, and he deserves the answer. We can extend this to note that God answers our questions because he loves us.

Matthew, in his writing and recording of the gospel in his name, quotes a teaching from Jesus. He does not say that we are not to love the special things and people in our lives, rather, we are to love God more. Our first love in this life is to be our love for God. We love God because we are responding to the love that he first gave us. It is from God that we first experience a love that for us is life and life to the full.

The question that arises is this: "if we are to love God above all else, should we be perfect in every way?" The answer is, "Of course not." There is no way that we can be perfect in every way, and if this was to be a condition of God's love for us we would all fail dismally. God loves us even though we are imperfect. This was the whole point of the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus came so that even though we sin in this life we may share eternal life with God when this earthly life concludes.

How precious are we? We are worth more than many sparrows and the hairs on our head are numbered. If God is committed to our value being measured by the death of the most common bird and the hairs on our head, how much must he value our whole being.

What is expected of us in return? Only that we are to acknowledge God in our conversation and thought processes. We are to acknowledge God in our prayers and our worship. We are to commit ourselves to God in our daily lives.

It is only if we intentionally deny God that we will find ourselves wanting. If we deny God, deny Jesus, Jesus will deny us. We are reminded of the parable of the ladies with their lamps. When they knocked on the door, having abandoned their role to gather more earthly

stores of oil, he told them to go away because he did not know them. To deny Jesus is folly. We are to fear only one thing in this life. We are to fear the one who can steal both our body and our soul. The only one who can steal body and soul, is Satan. It is in succumbing to the temptations of the devil that turns our heart away from the Love of God.

Our imperfections are well known to God. In the first letter of John we are told *that "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."* This means that while we may hide our prejudice and our sins from the people around us, we will never be able to hide them from God. and even though God knows our deepest thoughts, he continues to love us.

John points out very clearly that we know love because Jesus laid down his life for us. As a result of this example and gift we are to be prepared to lay down our lives for the others. we see this very clearly in the sacrifice made by members of the armed services as, over the centuries, they have put their lives on the line to protect the lives of those at home.

It is apparent that not every person is a member of the Armed Services. Not everyone will be expected to enter into battle. Even so, we will not know whether we will risk our lives for another until we are placed in that position. In the media the other day, during the protests in London, a black man risked his life to save the life of a white man who had been pushed to the ground and who was likely to be killed. He lifted him onto his shoulder and carried him out of danger.

How then are we to live our lives? The answer is before us. John says it like this; *"Little children, let us not love in word and speech but in deed and truth."*

The underlying meaning is not so obscure that we cannot understand. The act of love must be more than merely speaking about it. It must be more than a quick gossip over a cup of tea. The message is very straight forward. We are to live our lives as examples of our faith. Not in perfection, but as Matthew explains it, *"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master; it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master."*

It is enough for us to be like Christ. We do not have to be perfect, but we are to do our best to love as Christ loves and to act as Christ acts.

It is when we make God our first love. It is when we love God above all else. That we will be seen as a true example of faith in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is our calling, and we strive to do our best.