

## A Sermon preached by Emma Hodge at St. Michael and All Angels' Church on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2019

*May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight of Lord our strength and our redeemer*

### Introduction

I wonder when you heard today's gospel reading if any phrase or word jumped out at you, or did it just pass by? There is, of course, no right answer to this,

To me, one of the first things that struck me was the phrase "**If you love me....**"

Before we explore this in more detail, let's start by looking at the context of the gospel reading.

This passage from St. John's gospel is set in the last few days of Jesus' earthly life, when he is preparing his disciples for a future, a future where he would not be with them in person. Earlier in the chapter Jesus comforts his disciples while preparing them. Jesus was preparing them this time for his death, but he knew that his death would not be the end, instead the disciples, and by extension us, would need to carry on his work.

Jesus being the good leader that he is, wanted to ensure that he had given his disciples the instructions that they would need and prepares them for what is to come. How fully the disciples grasped and understood this at the time is a matter for debate.

Anyway, to return to our gospel reading....

### If Ye Love Me

Jesus asks "*If you Love Me...*"

This is not a command. It is not an instruction. It is not "*You **WILL** love me*" but instead it is a question, however it is not the question that is uncertain "Do you love me?" but instead it is a question of certainty "*If you love me*" that same question that was asked of the first disciples is also asked of us today, it is an individual question.

Let's take a moment to imagine Jesus standing in front of each one of us asking us "*if you love me...*"

This question is full of hope and before the disciples have a chance to answer Jesus; he goes on and tells them how to show that they love him. Jesus is not looking for empty words, or even words full of meaning, but instead he is looking for actions.

Jesus wants his disciples, and that includes us, those who have affirmed that they love Jesus, and Those who love him to keep his commandments. However Jesus does not want a simple relationship where if we love Jesus we keep his commandments, instead

he knows that following him; loving Him; and Keeping his Commandments is hard and because he knows just how hard following his instructions and commands really is. Jesus assists his disciples, and us, by the giving of gifts. Two gifts are mentioned in our gospel reading which Jesus gives us

## Peace

The first gift is his Peace

Peace in this context is not the worldly peace which involves lack of conflict (including tensions between people) but another word for this could be serenity. The inner peace which is hard work to obtain and even harder to keep. This peace can be described as a feeling of being held in the palm of God's hand.

Jesus knew that the work the disciples (which includes us) had to do would be challenging and that there would be adversaries along the way; from those who seem to be deaf to what we say; from the pressures of life; being torn in different directions with conflicting demands on our time. This is one of the reasons he gave us his peace, as we would need to work to maintain His peace.

However in order to keep this sermon short, I'm going to move on from peace to the second gift,

## Holy Spirit

The second gift is the Holy Spirit

Jesus tells his disciples that after his death he will ask God the Father to provide the disciples with another gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus describes the Holy Spirit.

While the Old Testament does contain references which can be interpreted as the Holy Spirit, (such as in Ezekiel chapter 37 which is the story of the Valley of Dry bones), the Holy Spirit as we understand it, would have been an unfamiliar concept to the first disciples, which is why Jesus has to describe what it is he is providing the disciples with.

If you look at this reading in different translations of the bible, how the holy spirit is described in John's gospel, differs depending which translation you are using, some versions describe the holy spirit as the advocate, while others will use comforter, counsellor, or helper... but don't let the different names confuse you, they all are pointing to the same attributes. The Greek word, which the translators have problems with is (with apologies to Greek scholars for any mispronunciation) PARA-AK'-LAY-TOS which is defined as someone who comes to another person's assistance, especially in court, someone who pleads another cause, an intercessor.

Describing the Holy Spirit as the Helper or Advocate tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit is there for them. To support them in tough times, to encourage them when

their work which Jesus has given them, seems impossible and keeping Jesus' commandments seems too hard.

The Holy Spirit is there to assist the disciples (which include us and not just the first disciples), not to do the work on its own, but with the disciples. An advocate or helper needs someone to assist, and this is the same with the Holy Spirit. We are the people the Holy Spirit helps.

The Holy Spirit is the advocate or helper. The Holy Spirit is there to help us to keep on loving Jesus, to keep following him and to keep his commandments, which include the commandment to tell (and that includes telling through actions) other people about Jesus. As the advocate the Holy Spirit helps us to do the work which Jesus left us; The Holy Spirit needs us to work it can't do it on its own.

The Holy Spirit is here for us and as we heard in our gospel reading, Jesus asked our Father God to send the Holy Spirit. A gift not just from Jesus but also from God as they knew that without the Holy Spirit the work would not get done, not because of lack of will, or prevarication, but because we would have to do it on our own and not through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth who will guide and accompany us as we work to keep Jesus commandments as well as to tell other people about Jesus.

As the Helper, the Holy spirit is a gift from Jesus, we need to receive the gift, this doesn't just mean keeping it safe but it means we need to continue to let it help us and to let it grow within us. At Evensong and Mattins, one of the response that is sung is "and take not thy holy spirit from us" we also need pray that the gift of the Holy Spirit remain with us.

Jesus asked His Father to send the Holy spirit to his disciples, the disciples are not limited to the first disciples but also include us. The Holy Spirit, the Helper or Advocate is a gift from Jesus. The disciples and us are the recipients of the gift. We need to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

## Gifts

Christ's peace and the Holy Spirit are both gifts from Jesus. When you receive a gift, what do you do with it, do you say thank you nicely and then put it back in the box, and put it at the back of the cupboard (or possibly recycle it as a raffle prize donation!) or do you value it and use it?

The Gift of Peace needs to be valued, it needs to be treasured and not to be pushed to one side, the same applies to the gift of the Holy Spirit is no use sitting in a box in the cupboard; it needs to be used! For it to be used, we need to work with the Holy Spirit.

The peace of Christ and The Holy Spirit are gifts from Jesus.

Receive the gift of Christ's peace. Imagine yourself being held in the palm of God's hand and celebrate that feeling.

Receive the gift of the holy Spirit and pray that it will remain with each one of us and that we will continue to grow as we use it.

Holy Spirit, come, confirm us  
In the truth that Christ makes known;  
We have faith and understanding  
Through your helping gifts alone.

Holy Spirit, come, console us,  
Come as Advocate to plead,  
Loving Spirit from the Father,  
Grant in Christ the help we need.

Holy Spirit, come, renew us,  
Come yourself to make us live;  
Holy through your loving presence,  
Holy through the gifts you give.

Holy Spirit, come, possess us,  
You the Love of Three in One,  
Holy Spirit of the Father,  
Holy Spirit of the Son.

Brian Foley