

“This is how the world will know”

We are offering a series of reflections for individuals and churches who may be finding it difficult to provide midweek prayer and shared learning from Scripture. You can use these by watching the YouTube video, reading the relevant Bible passage and then reflecting on the questions below. To help make this a shared activity, you are encouraged to reflect on this together with friends using an online conference package, or simply arrange with a friend for them to watch it too. Then ring each other up, share your thoughts and responses and then pray for one another, and pray together for our world.

Read John 13:33-35 & John 15:12-17

If you can, watch the YouTube video: https://youtu.be/dwRO1OK_VXw

When so much of our routines have been disrupted and our regular activities as church communities feel as if they are “on hold” – we might well begin to wonder how we communicate with the world around us the truth and reality of our message. The first disciples were faced with a very similar question as they sat at table with Jesus on the night before he died. Their world was about to be turned upside down and so many of the familiar markers of their faith and identity would be significantly disrupted, but Jesus offered them one simple message – “This is my command, love one another as I have loved you. This is how the world will know that you are my disciples”

You are invited to spend some time reflecting on the hope and challenge that this contains as we embrace our current circumstances. In particular, we can notice:

The love that we have for each other is inseparable from the love we have for God: Jesus makes the point that by remaining in his love, we are both inspired to obey him and equipped to live as a people of love. We might say that the love that we have for one another is a measure of the love that we have for God – and the resources that we need to love each other will be found in our love for God. If we are finding it difficult to love others – do we maybe need to work on our relationship with God? If we are looking for a measure on our relationship with God, when many of the ways we might normally express it aren't there – we might reflect on the quality of our relationships with God's people and recognise that this is a central expression of who we are.

The cross is our example of love: The words “greater love has no-one than to lay down their life for their friends” are profound however and wherever they were uttered. But these were spoken by someone who was about to do just that. While the cross is an important reality in understanding our salvation and our eternal destiny – we cannot escape the fact that the Bible also presents it to us as an example to be followed. In short, Jesus is saying that there is no sacrifice too great. Love is costly, love is not easy, love makes demands of us – but Jesus makes it clear that this is a price he is willing to pay. We might therefore reflect on some of the reasons we find it hard to love others – and commit ourselves to do what it takes to respond to that new commandment which Jesus offers.

This is how the world recognises faith that is real: We talk a lot about the need to make our message known and there are lots of ways we might do that. We might be frustrated because in recent months we haven't been able to do some of those things. But Jesus is clear about how we make our message known – we let the world see that we are Jesus' disciples by loving each other – not by what we organise. In 1 Corinthians 13 we are reminded that it's possible to be the best communicator in the world but if you haven't got love – you're just a noisy irritation. We have to accept that the journey ahead is likely to make a lot of demands of us – but this does not mean we cannot express our faith or be fruitful. Jesus ends with the assertion that if we love each other, we will bear fruit, fruit that will last.

PRAYER

God of love, though the days we face are difficult and demanding, help us to hear again your New Commandment to love one another as you have loved us. Help us make this our priority, so that through the love that we show and share, others will see and believe the truth that we hold as your disciples. Help us, by your Spirit, to live lives that bear the fruit of love. AMEN