

“A new command I give unto you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” John 13 v34,35

The great detective Columbo, you will remember, used to say *and one final thing...* and it was often the most important thing. The last word that solved the mystery.

Today our passage speaks of Jesus' last words to his disciples.

Like Columbo, it was as though he was leaving the world and he says...*One final thing!*

If you like, this is Jesus' last word and testament to his disciples.

It was his “*Will*” . A will is a legal document in which an individual records his or her wishes as to how their possessions and affairs should be handled after their death. The individual making the Will may specify, for example, who should take custody of their children, and which heirs should be given certain specified assets.

Jesus was laying before them his wishes, his will, as to how they would continue his affairs on earth when he was no longer here!

This is the last piece of the jigsaw, the final word...*Love one another!*

Christian Aid Week is a timely reminder of God's love in action. Their motto is that we believe in life before death.

Our lectionary reading today comes from John's Gospel where Jesus speaks his final words on earth.

The disciples may well have asked, What is it that Jesus wants us to do? How do we carry on his mission? Well what did he tell us?

Love one another, as I have loved you.

These words are simply not an option for us, it is a command! I command you! There is no getting away from these words of Jesus! If we are to call ourselves Christians, then these words need to be at the heart of what we believe.

He calls it new.... not because it had never been given before, but because it was to be the highest of commands; it was to be honoured and to be held with great prestige. Above all, it was to be the best test of Christianity before the world.

Love one another as I have loved you.

So, in these words, Jesus is saying... imitate my life...imitate my love.

There is no higher standard than the love of Jesus. Why am I a follower of Jesus? Because there is no better way known to man than his way!

But as we look at these words closely, notice that they begin in God's love.

To love we need to be loved!

Jesus said, *as I have loved you, so you must love!*

He set the bench mark, he set the standard.

On that sunny day, by the lake of Galilee, when he called the fishermen, to be his first disciples, he said simply, *follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*, and now we see his final words to the same disciples, he is saying something very familiar, *as I have loved you, so you love others*.

By following Jesus, we learn how to love others. By looking to his standards, it will reflect upon us.

The big question, do we know how much God loves us? If we don't then this will reflect upon the love we share.

When we are totally secure in God's love, as a child is secure in the love of their parents, so we will want to share this love with others.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote a great wee book simply called *God Has a Dream* and in his book he speaks about love – God's great dream for this world. If anyone wants a read of this, I'll pass it on to you.

As you would imagine he speaks about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. A commission to bring healing to this land, torn apart by racial discrimination. Nelson Mandela led the commission. This gave perpetrators of political crimes the opportunity of amnesty by telling the truth; an opportunity to ask for forgiveness, an opportunity that some took and others did not.

As he writes, he speaks of how some of these people were like monsters. But he says that we are reminded that God's love is not cut off from anyone.

Whether we are good or bad, God's love is unchanging and unchangeable, Like a tireless and long suffering parent, our God is there for us, when we are ready to hear his still, small voice in our lives.

If God can love the cruellest and vilest of individuals, who have committed these atrocious acts of inhumanity, there is hope for us all. As the two criminals were dying on the cross beside Jesus, one reaches out to him and receives mercy, the other scorns and rejects him.

The lovely song goes, the greatest loves is to love yourself.

To know that you are loved is to

- understand and recognise that you are a worthy and valuable person. It begins here....God values us and loves us.

- knowing yourself and accepting yourself as you are right now, regardless of your past, for God forgives you.
- realising that you are unique and worthy of lots of love!

There is only one of you in the entire universe! Each of us is completely different from one another. It's important to note that everyone feels they have certain things about themselves that they see as flaws or as weaknesses. No one is perfect! Once we are able to recognise our strengths and our self-worth we see that the God who created us, loves us for who we are!

So Jesus commands us to know his love and to allow his love to heal us and to make us into his disciples.

This is not merely a notion or an idea but it is a practice in our lives. Every day, we again come to God's love and like a shower in the morning, we allow his love to cleanse us, and to refresh us and to set us on track for another day.

It is first and foremost. Without it we dare not call ourselves Christians, how can we? If we are not reflecting something of the Master, if we are not walking in his ways or obeying his commands.

It ought to show itself in our dealings with all people, despite their denominations, backgrounds, we should have the common language and bond of love.

It is this love that motivates us to do his will and to love others.

To love others shows that we are confident in God's love.

Christian Aid began as an outreach to Germans after the Second World War. One minister saw this as his calling and he began to rally support here in Scotland to minister to the needs of those who were called enemies but were now destitute.

It must have been a brave thing to do! With so much suffering here at home, he began to lift the eyes of his own people to help the enemy. It was the work of Jesus, and that is why it has succeeded to this very day; it is the work of Jesus, it is his hands, his feet, his mouth.

When we give to Christian Aid, we are fulfilling the great command, *love one another as I have loved you*.

So as we begin Christian Aid week, let us pray, let us encourage those in need. Let us support those who work for others and let us do it, not because we've got to, let us do it because we are loved, truly loved by God.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.