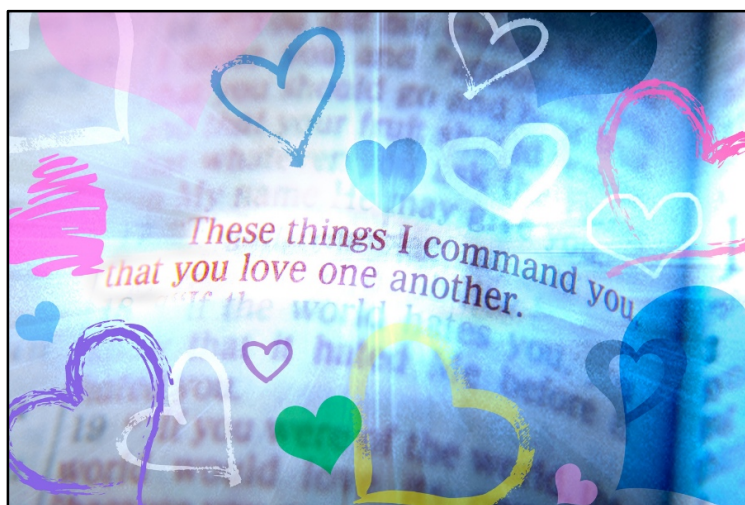


# Online reflection on Sunday 14 May 2022 by Kath Oates, Lay Leader of Worship

*(Reading: John 13: 34-35)*

## A New Commandment



*'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*

I'm sure that many of you will be familiar with these words from the song "A new commandment". Maybe its tune was playing in your head as you heard the Bible reading. Jesus speaks these words to his disciples at the Last Supper. He has just washed their feet and then gone on to predict his betrayal, which in turn has led to Judas leaving the gathering. He now turns to the remaining disciples, tells them that he will soon be leaving them and gives them this new commandment:

*'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.'*

We can see another commandment about love in Matthew's Gospel; a Pharisee has asked Jesus which is the greatest commandment. Jesus replies: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself." In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is asked: "Who is my neighbour?", and he answers by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan; our neighbour is anyone in need. But here, in John's Gospel, Jesus' command is different. They should love one another as he has loved them. So how has Jesus loved them? What does this love look like?

His love is unconditional. He loves them just as they are, with all their imperfections.

He loves them whatever their background or social standing. Some of his followers are looked down on by others in society, as they include tax collectors, fishermen, northerners and even women! All are valued, all are included and all are loved.

It's a forgiving love; it holds no grudges. He knows that Peter will soon deny him but Jesus will forgive him and give him an opportunity for restoration. He even bears no grudge against Judas who will go on to betray him.

He is generous towards them, devoting time to teaching and preparing them for the work they will be called to do. He actively involves them in his ministry; it's a very practical, hands-on training programme. He trusts them, sending them off to put their training into practice without

him. And he's there when they need help and encouragement.

It's a patient love. Many times they miss the point and he gently directs them back to where they should be.

It's a humble love. He is willing to get down on his knees to wash their feet, to do the job usually reserved for a servant. And it is a love which is so great that he is prepared to die for them on the cross.

*'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*

Jesus tells them to show this kind of love to each other so that the world will know that they are his followers. He is also calling us to show this same love for one another. But what does this mean; what could this look like?

I'd like to share a story with you from my time in Germany. Geoff and I had moved to Munich due to his work at NatWest Bank. We didn't know anybody there and I spoke very little German. On our first Sunday, we decided to go to the service at the English-speaking Methodist church in the centre of the city. On that particular Sunday, they were following a new format as they experimented with a more contemporary style of worship. I don't remember much about the service but what I do remember is that a number of people in our age group were having a pot luck lunch at someone's house and that they invited us to join them. We happily accepted their hospitality. Later, over lunch, they were debating the merits or otherwise of the new service. Some had loved it; others preferred a more traditional

format. I was asked for my thoughts and I told them that what had been important for me that day was not the nature of the church service but the fact that they had asked us to lunch. We had been invited into a loving community and had experienced God's love through their love. That was all that mattered.

There is a saying that Christianity is caught, not taught. Most people are drawn to God not by a sermon or some great teaching, but because they see something in the life of Christians which attracts them. They see our love for one another and they are drawn towards the God who is the source and inspiration of that love.

Jesus says that we shall be known by our love for one another. Not by our learning, our doctrines, our worship or our piety but by our love.

Amen