

Sermon 25 May 2014 Acts 17:22-31 John 14:1-11
'Never Abandoned'

Prayer: God, parent of us all and of Jesus, thank you for your spirit of truth that unites us with you and with Jesus. Thank you that your presence with us is constant. Unite us as one body so that we may support and strengthen one another in love like yours. Amen.

Never abandoned, Jesus promises his disciples: **you will never be abandoned**. The 'you' – of this speech, beginning from: 'If you love me' is plural until verse 21. This means it is not an individual Jesus is talking to until verse 21. So we start today with Jesus words being for **all** of those listening. **All listening** to Jesus words, *therefore* we are included – **all of us** are told that Jesus is going, but will not leave us abandoned – he will ask the Father to give us another to walk / to be alongside us forever.

This snippet of conversation belongs to a much larger one. John is telling us Jesus farewell speech to his disciples. The one of the last Passover, just hours before the events leading into Good Friday and Easter Sunday unfolded. . . . So in our passage today Jesus knows his time with them is coming to an end and – is giving his last instructions / words of wisdom. Today the focus is on love, a major theme in John's Gospel. Jesus gives his 'new' commandment – to love one another, as he washes the feet of the disciples, *just a few verses before our readings today*.

The language of today's verses is a fascinating study; but it could easily set our backs up, let alone newcomers to Jesus and his teachings! Especially if we were to believe we could take single sentences out of their context in the passage / Gospel / Bible and let them stand alone. It stands as warning I guess not to do this with scripture verses, because if we did then we would just have 14:15 "**If** you love me, you **will obey** my **commands**." *Without* the fabulous surrounding words that make this into a reassuring, challenging Bible passage; not only for individuals – but for the whole faith community that *began* with the listening disciples having their feet washed, hearing a **new commandment**. cV

It is for the community to **demonstrate** love for Jesus by keeping Jesus commandments. Scholars wrestle 'with Jesus' command, or better, his observation that "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." It *almost* sounds as if all our talk of grace is meaningless in the face of a requirement like this. Does it really all come down to this – that we need to obey the rules (to love) and earn our way to heaven?' (KH-M)

K Huey-Matthews suggests that 'we might respond, first, that the commandments that mattered to Jesus were those two about loving God and loving our neighbour. And, we might add, he expanded our understanding of those commandments to include things like forgiveness, praying for our enemies, caring about the poor and the marginalized, and ordering our lives well, including our use of money – the thing we mostly don't want to talk about in church; none of this is easy!' cV

So there is a challenge in our listening with the use of the word "command-ments". Yes, Jesus **commanded** – but! But it is wrapped securely in the language of love; God's love, God in Jesus' love with the why, where and how we fit into that love-relationship. Jesus introduces the way as being through the Advocacy of the Holy Spirit.

We could easily get tangled in the 'just-how's' this happens, but we know it does happen because we experience the presence of the Living Lord as much as we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit as much as we know the presence of God. We know they are three – yet one – but we lack the words to be able to say it all exactly as we 'know' it happens. cV

I can easily hear Jesus talking to his companions for three mad; exciting, anxious, frightening, miraculous years. When you have shared that deeply you know the closeness of the link, of being one with each other. While being an 'outsider' I have often seen friendship parallels of Jesus and his

disciples and what I see / hear about army buddies. Distinct, yet one because of the depth of the relationship, “Best Friends” forever! As a teacher Jesus is leading them/ us into an awareness of where the Spirit fits in the scheme of things and how the Spirit works based on real human life scenario.

And what makes it all work is love, agape / God love. Love creates, enables, and holds it all in place so that Jesus listeners hear that, yes he is going ‘away’, **but** he will never abandon them / us. J Petty says: “Love counters fear. The text seems designed to provide comfort for the community in the absence of Jesus, as if to say, “Don’t worry. Everything will be all right.” You will have help. What’s more, Jesus says, “I come to you.” The verb is **present** tense, meaning that Jesus is always a present reality.”

*They will still “see” him and those who love him “will be loved by my Father” as he will continue to “reveal” himself to those who love him. His disciples are finally getting the whole picture. Jesus is “in the Father, and you in me and I in you.” And the guarantor of these promises is Jesus’ promise of the advent of “another Advocate,” “the Spirit of truth”. **This** Spirit will be recognized only by those who are in this circle of Love. Jesus, who has given so much, indeed his all, now gives another gift that keeps the giving going. *=Sacraconversazione

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote about this excessive, never-ending giving (in his Summa Theologica (1a.38.2)): “A gift is freely given, and expects no return, **Its reason is love**. What is **first** given is love; that is the first gift. The Holy Ghost comes forth as the substance of love and Gift is his **proper name**.”

It’s all about love, permanent love that will never go away – in fact it is a love that was first, and foremost given to us in the language of ‘home’. In a few verses after our today BBTaylor points out that John remembers Jesus saying: “...and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (John 14:23). Not visit. Not *pass through* from time to time. Not send a *postcard*....John only uses the word ‘home’ twice in his gospel, both times around the supper table....” Is it any wonder that our church home has a table at its centre, not just architecturally but at the heart of our sacramental life together? This “permanent” home, Taylor writes, is “a giant heart of a place with room enough for **everyone whom love** unites. It is John’s idea of heaven to move in with the God who has moved in with us...” (*Gospel Medicine*). Cv

This is Paul’s God too – this is the God Paul declares to the listeners of Athens, quoting their poets: “The God **in whom we** live and move and have our being.” “We are His offspring”! *We know* Paul’s speech wasn’t a great success. But it’s important for at least two things. 1. The way Paul begins with where his listeners are, and weaves ‘Jesus – in – God – with us’ into daily life of his listeners! ‘God is nearer than you think’, Paul says, but God is not an idol made of silver or gold, nor can God be ‘housed (controlled) in/ by buildings. 2. Paul is not being what **we** might call a gate-keeper. Paul recognises that God is **already at work in the world**, and we must go to work to find out what. Then, like Paul we will ‘see’ Jesus in God – in the most surprising places and unexpected moments. cV

Each one of us, **just as in** every life and every community the question of God’s presence has been raised at least once. *Sometimes* it is tied to issues of evil – but for most it is personal struggle, personal pain, and the need **within each of us** to connect with something bigger than ourselves. Unfortunately, the Church has too often made God’s presence appear contained – available only to a select, chosen few – and we have implied that God cannot be found except within the walls of our buildings. (JVDLaar) We shut the gate, pretending we are the only loved ones, favoured ones invited to share around the table and be at home with God. **How wrong we are**. Cv

God has moved in with us Jesus promised, and their Gift makes sure our permanent home has enough room **for everyone whom love unites, everyone caught up in the circle of love**. ‘If we live and love as Jesus did, “we will live with clear consciences, with gentleness and reverence. The love that comes to us through the Spirit will overflow into the lives of others. We will be agents of God’s love in the world....Our lives will be evidence of the presence of the Spirit in our midst (.)”’; (Bergant) **Living evidence** of Jesus promise to never abandon, but to be with us always. Amen.