

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : Easter 6 ~ 21 May 2017, 8:00am Holy
Communion

This morning we continue to hear the farewell discourses as John records the last words of Jesus to his disciples. They would probably have found them very difficult to comprehend without our benefit of hindsight. But because we know what happens next, we know that Jesus is referring after his death and resurrection to the feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would empower them to begin their task of establishing the Christian Church. But Jesus goes on to remind them of his connectedness with the Father and that all is to be based upon love – the Father’s love for the Son and the Son’s love for us – for if we love God we will keep his commandments, for doing so is itself an act of love. When Jesus tells the disciples to love him and keep his commandments, he is placing himself in the tradition of Moses who gave the tablets of the law to the Israelites, the first of which commanded them to love the Lord their God with all their heart, mind and soul. So Jesus equated loving God with keeping commandments.

It is an idea which St Augustine of Hippo, (a Christian theologian living from 354 to 430) penned as “Love God and do as you please” thought that’s a somewhat flippant and cryptic version of the quote, which conveniently omits the second part which runs: “Love God and do whatever you please: for the soul trained in love to God will do nothing to offend the One who is Beloved.”

In fact, Augustine’s exact quote is this: “Once for all, then, a short precept is given thee: Love, and do what thou wilt: whether thou hold thy peace, through love hold thy peace; whether thou cry out, through love cry out; whether thou correct, through love correct; whether thou spare, through love do thou spare: let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good.”

However the phrase is known, perhaps Augustine may be onto something here – for as I have already reflected: if we love God we will keep his commandments, for doing so is itself an act of love. Many of course find it difficult, if not impossible, to love the creator God - but can do so by our love for his Son, Jesus of Nazareth, divine and human, to whom we are inextricably linked by our faithful Christian discipleship 21 centuries on.