

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : Sixth Sunday of Easter  
Sunday 22nd May 2021

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**EASTER 6 – MAY 22, 2022**

Last Tuesday this church and its congregation were prayed for by every other church in the diocese. This is something that happens on a rota basis and comes around about every 18 months. In preparation for this, the Diocesan Bishop likes clergy to drop him an email to outline matters for his prayers on that day. He never usually responds. But this year I wrote to tell him about the project that so many are involved with as we prepare to welcome a family from Syria. And he quickly rang me to say how delighted he was to hear of our project and to send his thanks and prayers to everyone involved in it from Christ Church, offering real and concrete assistance to just one of the millions of displaced families in our world today. This important project is just one illustration to remind us that we are not alone as Christians. We do not work and worship in isolation from the rest of the church – and we thank God for the network of support that exists in and through the Church of England, however imperfect we may feel it at times to be!

Next Sunday we hold our annual meetings – a necessary bit of admin that gives us the opportunity to thank all those involved in the life of the church and to reflect on what we are about as a congregation here at Christ Church. I hope you will read all 36 pages of the reports of the 20 or so different aspects of our life. Of course, you

will quickly spot where there are gaps and where we could do more or be better disciples. But we do try to hold to the mantra 'to do a few things and do them well'. Yes, I am sure you will all know of other churches and be envious of their exhaustive – sometimes perhaps exhausting? – work, but here we try to do what we can and to continue to play an active share in the life of the local community and of the wider church.

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" though 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."

In whatever form 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 in 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.

Five of John's twenty-one chapters are devoted to part of one evening – the Last Supper. The sweep and momentum of Jesus' teaching that night is remarkable. His talk of the Holy Spirit is especially mysterious. Even his use of the word 'Advocate' is tantalising. The Greek translation can mean 'helper', 'counsellor', 'comforter', 'consoler'. These are words that can link with Jesus' engagement with us today. He wants to engage with us, as he did his first disciples, and so he offers us peace. Hear again these extraordinary words where Jesus says: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid". Jesus does not want us to be stressed or agitated about our discipleship. He wants us to visualise him, the risen Christ, gathering his disciples by the lakeside fire in the early morning mist of Galilee where he renewed their call to be disciples. For by their actions to come, it must surely follow that the whole Church will obey his command and draw all people to the fire of his love. Amen.