

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 15:9-17

Christianity is all about *love*; everybody knows that, and in particular those who know but little about the Christian faith. In fact, often those who know the least about the Christian faith will also be those who know the loudest that Christianity is all about *love*, and will belittle all who think that being Christian is any way to do with the Christian faith, or with Christ Himself, and what He teaches in Holy Scripture as His Truth and His way and His will.

And in a way it makes sense that those who know the least about the Christian faith will be those who not only know the most about *Christianity*, but also know it the loudest. Christians are not as concerned with *Christianity* as a concept, and could never be, and should not, as they are with the Christian faith. And even more important than *Christianity*, and more important the Christian faith, must *Christ Himself* be to a Christian; if He is not, the Christian in question is really not that, not Christian.

Although a Christian knows Christ only from how He makes Himself known in His Word, it is nevertheless to Christ Himself a Christian relates, and not to *Christianity* as a concept, as a religion, or even a belief system.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you, we hear today that our Lord Jesus said in that bitter last night in which He gave Himself over to suffer and die, and: *abide in my love*. Now, *Christianity* can mean different things to different people, and it does, and *love* can, also, and does, as abstract ideas and concepts. This, though, is the love the Christian faith is all about: *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you*. It is also the love the Christian *life* is all about, for it is the love in which our Lord Jesus commands His Christians to live. More importantly, it is the love Christ Himself is all about.

Greater love has no one than this, as we hear it today that He said it, *than that someone lay down his life for his friends*. And this He spoke to His disciples, to whom He said: *I no longer call you servants, rather, I have called you friends*. For this was His love for them, and is His love for us, that He was about to lay down His life for them, and for us, for their salvation, and ours. For this had He come, the Son of God, Himself God from eternity, and had Himself born into sinful Mankind, and baptised into our sin, to make Himself one with us, and with our sin, to bear it for us, and take it away from us.

And for this would He give Himself over, in that very night, into the hands of His enemies, to be judged by sinners, whose rightful Judge He Himself is, and shall be, when He comes again in glory, and to be judged, also, by the righteousness of God, He who is Himself the Holy One of God, cursed and condemned for the sin of all sinners, and with it, and have it die with Him and be for ever dealt with and done away with and be no more.

For this He had come, out of the eternal love of God, to live for us the life we owe it to God to live, in full and complete love and obedience to Him, and to suffer for us the punishment for our failure to live that life ourselves. As we hear it today that He said it: *I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love.* And therefore is it that He has been raised from death; so far did His righteousness outweigh our sin, His goodness our evil, that with His suffering and death the price and penalty has been paid, in full and in abundance, for the sin of sinners, and so we shall not perish in His judgement, but rather live and be with Him in that fullness of life which is His Kingdom.

This is His love for us sinners, who give Him so little reason to love us, and so much reason not to. And it is the fulfilment of that love which was for ever between the Father and the Son. *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you,* as we hear it today He said it; *abide in my love.*

This is the love the Christian faith is all about, because the faith of any and all Christians is faith in Christ as Saviour, and His love as our only salvation. It is the love Christ Himself is all about, who gave Himself over utterly and entirely to this love. And it is the love the Christian life is all about, for it is the love in which our Lord Jesus commands His Christians to live: *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.*

This, though, is not His *only* Commandment, now, is it, nor is it all that He has to say about love, not even today. *This is my commandment,* He says, as we hear it: *that you love one another as I have loved you.*

Now, this seems a bit strange, does it not? Well, it definitely must seem strange to those who know so little of Christ that they know so loudly that all that Christianity is is *love thy neighbour*. But even to us it raises a question, does it, not namely this: Is it really only *one another* Christians should love? Does not our Lord Jesus actually teach us to, well, *love thy neighbour*, and give to the poor, and all that? He does indeed, all through Holy Scripture; well, through most of Holy Scripture, I suppose I should say.

For in the Gospel according to Saint John, our Lord Jesus has not actually had His Apostle write of Him having said anything about good works as we usually understand those, about *love thy neighbour*, or giving to the poor, or anything like that. What the Apostle John relates our Lord Jesus teaching about love, and what he writes about love in his letters, it concerns either the love that was between the Father and the Son from eternity, or the love of the Son for sinners, and for the Father, that He gave Himself up to suffer for the salvation of sinners, or the love of the Son as He lives in His Church and gives life to sinners, or again, the love Christians must have for one another. In fact, in the writings of the Apostle John, it often seems that all these are one and the same, that for Christians to live in love for one another is actually code for Christians living together in the Word and worship of the love of Christ, receiving salvation from Him, out of His love, with His Word, and with His body and blood, in His festive meal of salvation.

Now, when it seems that way, it is because that is the way it is: the love of God is but one, as God Himself is one, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And the love Christians have, and must have, for one another is the love of God alive and at work in us. And His love is alive and at work in His Christians by His living Word of love, of what His love has done for us sinners, for our salvation, by which He makes His salvation to live in us, and His love, and His own life, with His Holy Spirit, who is His very innermost self, His own life, and His love.

Now, does this mean that we as His Christians should love each other only, and need not care about those who stand outside? Does it mean that to live together in the Word and worship of His salvation is the only good work we should do? No, it does not mean that; but it does mean that all the other works of love we should and must do as His Christian, because it is His will that we do, and because He works it in us that we do, well, they are not what our Lord is speaking to us about, not today. Today He speaks about His Christians living together in His love and letting His Word of love do its work in us, for our salvation; and as His Word of love does its work in us, we will also grow in love for Him, and for one another, and for everybody else; although, again, all that is not what our Lord Jesus is speaking to us about today.

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, as we hear it today that He says it, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love.

And it is by living in His love, in the Word and worship of His salvation, that we abide in His love.

By His Word of how He Himself has loved us and suffered all judgement for us, the heavenly Judge declares all our sins and shortcomings to be dealt with and done away with, and so they are that. By His Word of the price He has paid for us He claims us as His own, and so we are that. By His Word of how the love that was for ever between the Father and the Son has been fulfilled in Him we are reconciled to Him. *I no longer I call you servants, as we hear it today that He said it, rather, I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known to you.* In other words, we are and remain on friendly terms with Him because He pronounces upon us the love with which the Father loved Him from eternity, and in which He commands us to abide. And we abide in His love by living in the Word and worship of His salvation, as was always His First and foremost Commandment: *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of slavery; you shall have none other!*

The love of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit works His will in us by His Word. He works love for Him, and to love Him means to love His Word and will and will to honour and obey His Word and will in our lives. *These things I command you, as we hear it today that He says it, in order that you may love one another.*

And this is all His own work, brought about out of His own will; it is not in any way of ourselves and our own. As we hear it today that He said it: *You did not choose me, rather, I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in my name He may give you.*

As usually, when our Lord Jesus speaks about His Christians *bearing fruit*, again, He is not so much talking about what so many Christians have been taught to think, about good works and *love thy neighbour*, rather, He is talking about *His* love being brought to fruition in us, so that, until the end, we seek from the Father that which He wills for us us to seek, rescue from His wrath in the remission of sins that is given to us in the name of our Lord Jesus, and have Him give that to us.

These things I have spoken to you, as He says it, as we hear it, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full, that is: that we may be preserve in the faith for that eternal fullness of joy which is His Kingdom.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. *Amen.*