

## Reflection for Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021

John 15; 9-17

### Are you feeling excited?

Clearly this is a continuation from last week (I did warn you this was to come). It is important to remember that the reading takes place in the context of the Last Supper (according to John's version) and we are still living the connection between the true vine and the branches that are called to give good fruit...

Last week I referred to giving the right type of fruit, and as you can see, this week's reading concludes with the same invitation, so it is clearly important to Jesus – to bear fruit that will last. But before we reach that point of the reading Jesus also speaks about being his friends and I believe this is one of the most caring and loving comments he says. It really is great. Have you ever spoken about Jesus or to Jesus **as a friend**? I think this might be a really good way to understand our mutual relationship, both with Jesus and with each other.

In today's reading Jesus is re-affirming what we read last week by speaking of the connection in love – *as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you* – and then he adds: **Abide in my love**. A permanence of this affection which leads to the way we live, where the commandments received are kept by what we do, and say, and even by the way we think, because it is that love that makes them important. The commandments, that were resumed into ONE with two parts: *Love God and love neighbour*. And this is something we have been following in Jesus' words over these last few weeks:

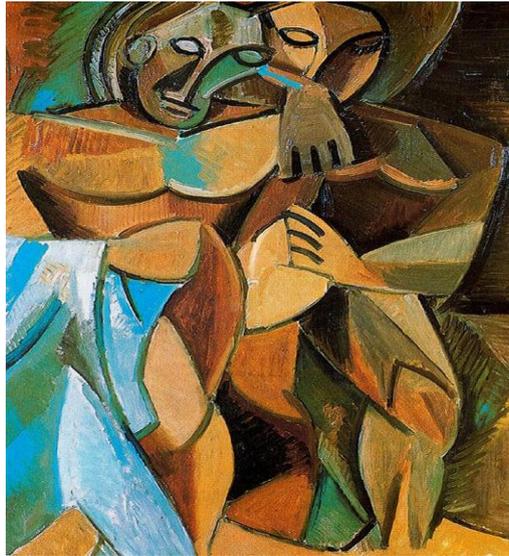
- I came not to judge the world but to save the world (12; 47)
- Liberation proclaimed and given generously, even urgently, even on the Sabbath (5; 1-19 and 9; iff), even at the risk of his life.
- Restoring life (11; iff), again, at the risk of his life.

For Jesus each of these is a sign of that union of love with the Father, and Jesus wants that union of love to be maintained between him and the disciples, and those who came after them. And in most of those liberating moments we read of, we also hear how this deep love shown by Jesus affirms the religious leaders' intention of killing him.

And as we come close to the end of this reading, we have returned to the branches that give much fruit, fruit that will last, clearly summed up in the words "**Abide in my love**", read through chapters 14 and 15 and discover how many times this idea is present.

Jesus is reminding us that this deep love is risky, it involves us in the way of life we find in him. This is the commandment he is referring to: *that you love one another as I have loved you*. And having said this he introduced the bond of friendship – he who in chapter 13 washed the feet of the disciples as a servant, now calls them friends and not servants, because they know everything. Friendship based on the love that is all giving, because this is what Jesus wants his followers to do.

What Jesus refers to is that while being servants is a vertical relationship: from master to servant, friendship is a horizontal relationship – all involved are on the same level. And this is what I pick up in the Picasso painting (I know not all like Picasso), look at the painting. Friendship as that mutual relationship, being there for each other. That horizontal connection of trust, of respect, of care, of love – this is what I see Jesus talking about, when he says: "I call you my friends".



Pablo Picasso – Friendship

Jesus is establishing a new relationship with the people, a relationship which they are called to reciprocate. And this is the turning point, one which questions us about our mission, about our priorities, about our life. When was the last time we thought about our priorities, or thought about the direction of our relationship with God, with others, even in the wider circle of life beyond our community? In a world where so much is expressed as power and dominance, our faith is built in a totally different way.

What then does it mean to be chosen? And as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, when Reflecting on the sheep who are not of the same flock as we are, recognising that Jesus' choices are far and wide, and generous even beyond ourselves. We are called, chosen; but so are others. As we are called friends, so others are also called friends. So how does this help us understand the interdependency of this friendship.

Jesus is the one who lays down his life for those he loves and resurrects for that life and that friendship. Jesus sets out the priorities, and in a couple of weeks, when we celebrate Pentecost when we will be confronted with the Spirit that opens doors and windows far and wide. And discover that giving much fruit that lasts is going to become a much bigger task than we ever imagined.

As I write this, I feel excited, because these are such different times from anything we have lived before, a time to be challenged, to be renewed, to create new connections, and to live our faith in a new way. Times to remember we have a good friend who is walking with us, and we have other friends on the same journey. So, as I stretch out my hand, I hope to find other hands doing the same thing. I am excited – and I hope you are too. Amen

Let me close with the Collect for this Sunday:

***God of abiding love, you choose us as your servants and dare to call us friends: take our fragmented hearts, commanding them to love, making whole our joy, and life reborn in you; through Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for us. Amen.***

Prayers for an inclusive church.