

At the Family eucharist this morning at 0930 at CC, the 98 children and 104 adults made a giant heart. The children created the traditional heart shaped figure the whole length of the aisle. Every child looked at the child on their right and on their left and shook hands, acknowledging that we can love each other because God has loved us. And at the heart of this heart, was the eucharistic bread and wine- the body and blood of Christ. The point was, of course, to emphasise, to incarnate the fact that We love because God has first loved us.

That solidarity between Jesus and his followers, which last week was expressed in the image of the vine and its branches, is now expressed, just a few verses later in the Gospel, as being rooted in terms of human experience.

And core to this experience is what we see in this Jesus of Nazareth- do we see a Rabbi, attracting a circle of students. Do we see him as a political leader, gathering recruits for his

policies, Do we see him as a philosopher propagating tenets of faith, was he a missionary needing helpers to reinforce his message. Well, maybe a bit of each of these, but today's Gospel suggests something else, namely that he offers friendship. 'I call you friends', he says.

I guess core to that relationship of any human friendship, is that two people have to share a degree of equality for friendship to work. In New Testament thought, one would hardly expect a master to be a friend to his slave.

Jesus implies that he shares everything with his friends, no one is his slave, all enjoy equality with him because every human being carries the image of God.

You, like me, may remember those school playground moments of excruciating embarrassment, when two team captains picked their players, and Leathard was always

the one left standing. – second goalpost was usually my role. There is no sense in which Jesus of Nazareth deals in this sort of favouritism or utilitarianism- a message made very clear in the reading from Acts, as Peter amidst Jewish Christians recognise their equality with Gentile Christians. Or as we read in the epistle that anyone who sees in this Jesus of Nazareth God in action, is a child of God.

The point of this, is of course that the relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and his followers needs to be echoed in every relationship which those followers have in their own experience. There is no boundary to the ripple effect of living out that love which we see between Jesus and his friends, no place where that doesn't pertain in every human relationship. No place- not towards the miserable old curmudgeon at work, the terrorist bent on violence, the self centred carefree drug dealer, the knife bearing gang leader, the power hungry politician. In Desmond Tutu's words 'an enemy is a friend waiting to be made'- it may

never be quite that straightforward, but it's a significant starting point and reminder. Or as the ancient Maundy Thursday antiphon reminds us 'Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est' Wherever love and charity dwell, there is God.

Unlike Jesus of Nazareth, we may never be called to lay down our life for our friends, yet we ought most certainly to respect those- peace makers, peace keepers, aid workers, like those from the World Central Food Kitchen who lost their lives in Gaza. But we are most certainly called to lay down all that in our lives precludes that friendship based upon equal ground, the friendship of this Jesus based upon based up equality of relating one with another.

In a week when we have seen the polemics of party politics played out once again, we do well to take note , and be humbled by those vast millions queuing across India during the six weeks of their general election- irrespective of what might be the outcome, but that eagerness to express a relationship of mutuality, to cherish

the long fought for respect and equality of a democratic state, is worth standing for hours to bother to vote.

Fred Kaan the 20thC hymnwriter put it like this :

For the healing of the nations

Let us pray with one accord

For a just and equal sharing of the things that earth affords

To a life of love in action

Help us rise and pledge our word

All that kills abundant living

Let it from the earth be banned

Pride of status, race or schooling

Dogmas that obscure your plan

In our common quest for justice

may we hallow life's brief span.

You creator God, have written

Your great name on humankind  
For our growing in your likeness  
bring the life of Christ to mind.  
That by our response and service  
Earth its destiny may find.

For You are my friends, says Jesus, if you love  
one another. Small enough to start a change,  
yet big enough for a lifetime's endeavour.

Love one another.

BL

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