

St Andrews Morning Prayer Easter 5 28th April
1 John 4:7-end; John 15:1-8; Acts 8.26-40; Ps: 22.25-31

O Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and fill them with love for you and for each other. Amen.

Quiz time! A fortnight ago I gave the children two points to ponder; I wonder if anyone can remember them?

Be prayerful;// Be prepared.

Then last week Michael had 4 points, also from John's letter, nicely following on the theme of being prepared: ?

God's love for us;

Our love for God;

No condemnation;

Some commandments.

Today we have the next chapter of John's first letter. 1 John, by the way, comes before 2 John and 3 John in our Bibles only because it is longer. Almost certainly it was the last of the three to be written, and I'd encourage you to read them in order. Perhaps find a quiet spot this afternoon, and a modern Bible – perhaps the Good News Bible if you have it – and read 2 John, then 3 John, and then 1 John. You can do it in an hour. And you'll see how John had to help his readers to know that they were the true believers, those who had split the church were not.

In this chapter, John continues the theme of being prepared: prepared to live our lives as Christians; prepared to meet our Lord eventually, and to be transformed to be like him.

And as Michael stressed last week, the focus is love. **Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

End of sermon? Well, not quite.

John makes some rather trenchant, even frightening, comments about what constitutes real love.

There had obviously been some problems in the churches John is writing to. In chapter two he writes of some people who went out from us, because they were not really of us; and their attitude had been anything but loving. And at the end of our reading from 1 John, we have these words: **Those who say, I love God, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.**

Our Lord said the same thing: if our Gospel reading had been just a couple of verses longer we would have read this:

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

If you do read through John's letters you should be struck at the number of times the words 'love' and 'commandment' occur together: God's commandment is that we love one another, and in chapter 5 **the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments.**

But it's no good just saying it. Love for John, and for Jesus, is an action, not a gooey feeling. We are commanded to love as he loved us. How did he love us? By giving his life in service to us: so we must serve one another. How? Well, at the moment the church needs some servants. Critically, we need at least one church warden to support Bruce and to keep the church running smoothly. We need people to help with Messy Church, our

children's outreach. We could do with more singers for our Pentecost evensong. And there are probably many individuals who could do with a dose of loving service. How will you discover them? Only by getting to know each other, by looking for opportunities. Find someone to love – or, rather, find some **way** to love. Practise loving.

In the collect we prayed that as God puts into our minds good desires, so we should bring them to good effect. Perhaps we should be praying for good desires to put into effect.

Then John says a very strange thing. It's often quoted, sometimes rather unhelpfully, and often misunderstood. **Perfect love casts out fear.** When you look at the world today, do you fear for the future? Ah, well, you see, you just don't have enough love. Simple. Does that make you feel better?

Let's look at what John really says. **Love has been perfected among us in this** he says; **that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world.**

So the context is the day of judgement, when we shall have to give account of ourselves before God. Then he says **There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.** But that perfect love is primarily God's love for us, as Michael said last week, and therefore there is no condemnation and no need to fear. **We love, because he first loved us.** And right at the end of our reading, **The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.**

So you see we are back to Be prepared! Then it was put as **all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.** Here it is the commandment to love each other. In the gospel reading it was being prepared to bear much fruit. But it is all the same underneath. The fruit we bear is the fruit of love and service. Being pure as he is pure does not mean just getting rid of bad things and existing in a vacuum. It means being filled with the life of Christ, by his spirit, and expressing his love.

As I have love you. That's a pretty high standard, isn't it. And yet it goes with the confidence to face God, to plead his mercy and grace, and fear no punishment.

Be prepared. But also be confident. And in that confidence, determine to live this week for him, in his love.

Let's pray.

Lord, your love shames us, and yet gives us confidence to approach you, and to ask that today and every day we may live in that love, and share it with each other and with the world. Amen.