

Vine Church, Wynyard

Pontus Bramberg

Monday 12th June, AD 2023

In the passage we have just heard (John 15:12-17) we have heard twice the command of Christ that we should love one another. Some people might complain that we cannot choose to love because we are unable control our emotions but the love of which the Lord speaks is not really an emotion, which is why it can be commanded. The love we are to have for one another should be of the same kind as the love which Christ has for the world. This is a self-sacrificial love that wills the good of the other, which flows from and is uniquely similar to the love of Christ for ourselves. The greatest expression of this love, Our Lord says, is to lay down one's life for one's friends. Christ, of course, does this perfectly when he dies for humanity on the Cross. Some of us do get the opportunity to die for someone we love and that is indeed a very loving thing to do. Most of us, however will not be in that position. There is however a way to repeatedly and continually lay down our life for others without having to die: through acts of love; these acts can be big or small, perhaps visiting a sick relative or helping someone out. If we are unable to perform these acts we do not need to feel bad because God knows our hearts and never requires more than we can do. These acts of love are not saving in themselves but when we do them because of our faith in the Gospel, which does save us, they are a witness to the love of God living within us and pouring out into the world through us. Slightly earlier in this chapter (v.9) we are told that Christ has loved us as the Father has loved Him; Christ and the Father dwell within one another and if we believe God dwells in us and we in Him. Because God is love, love dwells in us when God dwells in us and pours out into the world through us. For Christians love is not optional, it is the very foundation of our faith because we believe that God not only *loves* but that He *is love* and that He dwells in the heart of every believer. This love should overflow in our hearts and pour out into the world; the world should see that we are Christians because we have love.

Sometimes it is useful to think about how we ourselves have loved people around us in this way or, perhaps more importantly, when others have loved us. When I prepared this reflection, I thought especially about a time a few years back when I was going through quite a difficult time in my life: I had an amazing friend who on several occasions refused to leave my side even if that meant sitting up all night with me. I wasn't quite able to express it at the time but looking back at it, I think this is definitely one way to lay down one's life for somebody.

Amen.