

St. Mary's Sanderstead & St. James Riddlesdown

Easter 4 22.4.18

1 John 3:16-24 - Love in Action

Dearest Jim,

No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you!

Your's forever, Marie.

P.S., Congratulations on winning the lottery.

You'll remember the story of the lawyer who asked Jesus "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" In other words, tell us what's the most important commandment of all the hundreds of the Old Testament commandments?

And Jesus tells him "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

This is the great and foremost commandment."

But then the lawyer got more than he bargained for because Jesus didn't stop...He said, "The second is like it "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

Jesus doesn't make a distinction between loving God and loving each other...

In 1 John 4 we read... If someone says, "I love God," but doesn't love brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?

A little girl was invited back for dinner after school by her friend. The vegetable was buttered broccoli and the mother asked if she liked it.

"Oh, yes," she replied politely, "I *love* it!"

However, when the bowl of broccoli was passed, she declined to take any. "I thought you said you loved broccoli."

The girl replied sweetly, "Oh, yes I do, but not enough to *eat* it!"

Who are our neighbour's and do we really love them...

As a curate in Manchester, I was encouraged by my incumbent to begin a piece of work in our sister church.

Sale was a relatively affluent area, but Sale Moor, the other part of our 26,000 people parish was predominantly made up of social housing, and many of the people were reliant on benefits.

So I put it to the PCC that I would start a food bank. “There are no poor people in our parish” said one of the PCC and the idea didn’t make much of an impression. But I was convinced and so start a food bank I did.

While initially slow, within 6 months it became very busy and many people used the service, however being part of the Trussel Trust meant that an individual could only use the service 3 times....

One day a young woman stood in the doorway looking embarrassed. She had been 3 times before, I remembered her because I had taken her shopping home for her on one of those occasions.

Setting a limit as to how many times one could use the food

bank seemed the right thing to do by those who set the rules as it was felt that some would begin to depend on the service or even use it as a part of their income stream.

Having assisted with a friend of mine in Portsmouth who runs the largest food bank in the south, I had often seen people collect their food only to go outside and either load it into a brand new car, or worse still sell it to someone as they left...

But here this woman stood, at the door and with no voucher, near tears and desperate for whatever I could give her.

Couldn’t I do something?

When Jesus was teaching and healing during the early part

of his ministry, there were times when the needs around him seemed overwhelming and he certainly didn't meet them all....

In Matthew's gospel we read, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

Historically this 4th Sunday of Easter is called Shepherd Sunday.

We read psalm 23 and remember that Jesus is our good shepherd, willing to lay down his life for us, the sheep of his flock.

Our second reading from the first letter of John echoes these words from the gospel, but John calls us to be more than simple sheep when we choose to follow Jesus.

We know love by this, he says, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

John's words seem straightforward enough, but maybe a

little extreme if we are to take them literally....so how exactly are we supposed to lay down our lives for each other?

Does John mean that we need to die for each another just as Jesus did?

Maybe in some rare instances, but in Sanderstead... I'm not sure how dying is going to help anyone except the funeral director.

When Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sin, he held nothing back, and so John's point I believe is that we need to be so committed to sharing God's love that we too are willing to give our all to that purpose.

The apostle Paul says it this way that our lives are to be "a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1)

And so Laying down our lives may mean sacrificing a busy

schedule that keeps us too occupied to notice someone.

Laying down our lives might mean setting aside our own personal agenda, so that we can be part of someone else's life, and invite them to be part of ours.

Laying down our lives could be taking the time to listen to someone who just needs to talk.

Laying down our lives isn't so much about dying for someone else, as it is living for someone else, putting their needs ahead of our own as an act of love.

All ok so far... but then John gets a little uncomfortable...
"How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?
Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

And so back to the woman who stood at the door of the

church with no food voucher... should I have sent her away because she had used up her quota and I was obligated to keep the rules...

How could I send her away....

I gave her what she needed...and I continued to give her what she needed along with many others who had also used their 3 vouchers.

But would I have been so generous with the food in my own cupboard...

I thought about this as I wrote today's sermon because as I was challenged when going into the tube station on Wednesday because there sat a man with a board saying he was homeless...no normally I go straight to MacDonald's and buy them a meal on Wednesday but I only had £2 in my pocket, and I wanted a cheeseburger at Victoria station...and so I walked by....

But the passage "I was hungry and you gave me something

to eat” came to mind as I got on the tube and I knew that my action was selfish...

Now I’m not saying that we give to everyone. But in truth we know when we walk by and know we shouldn’t I didn’t need that cheeseburger...but that homeless guy did...

Just as in an aircraft were told to put on our own oxygen mask before helping someone else, and Jesus says to pull the log out of our own eye before trying to remove the splinter from someone else’s eye, so we need to make sure that we are taking good care of ourselves even as we reach out to others.

Buying a homeless person a meal probably isn’t a lifechanging event, and it’s by no means the only way to show an expression of human love and compassion.

Believing in Jesus and loving one other is all one thing, but

it takes practice.

New ways of thinking and living require conscious repetition before they become habits.

Laying down our lives to take up a life of love does not come naturally to us because by nature human beings are self-centred.

But John reminds us that the Holy Spirit is right there with us, to guide us toward this kind of living, this way of loving. This way of acting..

This is how we make disciples for the transformation of the world: recognizing that every person we encounter is a child of God who brings value to the world, taking the time and energy to draw attention to that person’s value, so he or she can see just how great the Father’s love really is for them.

What we do makes a difference, and I guess what we have to decide is what kind of difference we want to make.

And so in closing...what difference will our love make to
someone this week and beyond... **Amen**