

## Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022, Easter 3

Readings: **Acts 9:1-6**

**Psalm 30**

Revelation 5:6-14

**John 21:1-19**

Over the years I have loved the movie version of the musical, 'Fiddler on the Roof', because I think it is a great story, with terrific characters, and wonderful songs. I enjoy the way that the principal character, Tevye, prays in many places, and the way that he loves his daughters as they grow up... even when they make decisions he doesn't understand. As each of his daughters marry for love Tevye finds himself thinking about his own, arranged marriage, to Golde. In the middle of the movie there is a lovely moment when he turns to her sitting beside him in bed and sings this important question, 'Do you love me?' She is surprised, and doesn't want to answer, but Tevye persists and sings the question again, 'Do you love me?'

Golde responds thoughtfully with these lyrics, *'For twenty-five years, I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow, why talk about love right now?'* Then to herself she sings, *'For twenty-five years, I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. For twenty-five years, my bed is his. If that's not love, what is?'* And she concludes by supposing that she does love him, and he concludes by supposing that he does love her! Each then affirms to the other that it was reassuring to know!

After much research, the American family therapist, Gary Chapman, concluded that people experience love in five ways. They are acts of service, quality time together, receiving gifts, receiving words of affirmation, and affectionate physical touch. Chapman calls them 'love languages' and suggests that even though there are five, we each have a primary love language. This means that one of the five love languages speaks more powerfully to us than the other four.

Hypothetically, if your primary love language was 'quality time' and your partner gave you gifts, took care of everything in the house, hugs you often, and affirms you with spoken and written words... you would not be feeling that loved because you yearn for them to just spend some time together with you! You might acknowledge that they're trying hard... but, they're not quite hitting the mark! I wonder if you've thought about this before, and if you have what your primary love language might be; and perhaps more importantly the primary love languages of the people you care for?

In today's Gospel Jesus is remembered asking Peter three times, *'Do you love me?'* My guess is that he didn't sing the question because it would have been an emotionally charged, real-life, conversation! Traditionally, the three questions are understood to be a counterpoint to the three times Peter denied knowing Jesus, after Jesus had been arrested. This is a safe way of interpreting the encounter between these two men because the focus is all on Peter, and we are just observers to a drama that unfolded? But, how would we respond if Jesus met us later in the week, and asked the same question: 'Do you love me?'

If we imagine someone looking at the way we live our life now, what evidence is there to suggest that we love God, or follow someone called Jesus?

Remember that time when Jesus was challenged by a lawyer to name the most important of the six hundred and thirteen Jewish laws? In response Jesus prioritised loving God and loving neighbour. What might loving God and loving neighbour look like using Gary Chapman's five 'love languages' as a framework?

What does 'quality time' with God look like for you? My hunch is that it would include private prayer, public worship, and Bible reading? In 'Fiddler on the Roof' Tevye sang prayers of thanks before a meal, and offered conversational prayer from his cart, in his house, and while sweeping a barn! In remembering Tevye's prayer we can be reminded that we can pray anywhere... but, usually there are some places in which we find prayer easier than others.

So, I wonder where your go to prayer space is? It could be somewhere in the house, or the garden; it could be while driving the car, walking, or sitting. Do you currently have a sense of energised vitality in your prayer relationship with God, or is it feeling pretty dry at the moment? How might that relationship be refreshed, and renewed?

We listen to readings in church, but understand that reading the Bible at home in a structured way, can also be incredibly life-giving. These days we can also listen to Bible readings through various Apps and Podcasts, and maybe these are ways to spend 'quality time' with God?

In prayer we can give and receive words of affirmation, and in Holy Communion we may even have a sense of being physically touched by God in taste?

In Christian stewardship we are encouraged to give some portion of our time, abilities, and finance...as gifts back to the One who we believe makes our lives possible; and, maybe the various ministries of the Church can be understood as 'acts of service'? Whether it's some form of pastoral care, or administration; ministry with children, or outreach to the those in need; whether it's helping to lead worship, or providing morning tea... all these things, hopefully, motivated by love for God and love for neighbor.

Jesus asked Peter three times, 'Do you love me?' and each time Peter answered, 'Yes!' After each response, Jesus gave a specific direction: '*Feed my lambs!*' '*Tend my sheep!*' '*Feed my sheep!*'

In the same way that we imagined Jesus asking us if we love him can we imagine Jesus giving us the same directions to: '*Feed my lambs!*' '*Tend my sheep!*' '*Feed my sheep!*'. If we did this, then who are the 'lambs' and 'sheep' we are currently feeding, and tending? and, How are we doing this?

In asking who the 'lambs' and 'sheep' are in our lives I'm inviting each of us to initially think of people that we know: our family and friends; our neighbours, and people at church; our colleagues at work, and the people we play sport with. In many ways each of those people and each of those relationships can be seen to be gifts from God. They may, or may not, share our faith in Christ but they probably know that faith is important it is to us. Surely these people are most of the 'lambs' and 'sheep' we called to feed and tend?

God has, does, and will... bring people we don't know into our lives and there may be opportunities to feed, tend, and get to know them. But, I think the primary group we are called to 'feed' and 'tend' are the people we are already in relationship with. If you like, they are 'the flock' we are part of – and who, in God's grace, we are called to bless:

Would you please join me in prayer:

**Holy God,**

**we give thanks for the gift of our lives and your love.**

**In your grace, give us wisdom and joy**

**as we express our love for you,**

**and express our love for those you have given us to share life with.**

**We pray in the name of the one who said, 'feed' and 'tend',**

**Jesus, the risen Christ.**

**Amen.**