

Bennochy church 13th May 2012

We don't always like our families, but we love them. Love is about what holds us together, even when it is falling apart, it is about expressions of love even in the midst of anger and it is about being close even when the distance is great.

The bible has many definitions of love, but the words of Jesus in the passage read earlier, expresses love in terms of a willingness to give up one's life for their friends. What a dilemma to be in! Self preservation or sacrifice, and in truth, we will never know just how much we love, until difficult decisions need to be made.

It might not be preservation of life that is involved, but our reputation, our finances, our time commitment; going that extra mile and putting someone else before ourselves.

The people of Israel knew what God expected of them, love God and love your neighbour, but Jesus came along and said that is not enough. Your neighbour is your enemy; your neighbour is the stranger you have yet to meet, your neighbour is someone very different from you, whom you might not even like. Your neighbour lives in different continents but lives alongside us, as part of God's creation and shares a common humanity with us.

Many did not like him for such words. Maybe they screamed at him, 'we are God's people' or an internal rage bubbled inside.

Even when talking about God, the same God as described in the history of Israel as one you could not look upon and live, Jesus says you are my friends and to prove it, I will give my life for you. *"The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them"*. And just to reinforce the point he says, you are not my servants, for a servant does not know what is going to happen.

This passage gives us the ideal image of friendship, made real in Jesus; loyalty, even to death; equality, mutual sharing and intimacy. Jesus says, you are my friends.

You don't choose your families; you are born into them with no choice. We can all say, I did not choose to be here. The family of God seems to be no different. *"You did not choose me, I choose you"*.

Is this the kind of love we want? Yet, that seems to be what happened to the early disciples of Jesus. 'Come follow me', and they did! Leave your nets, your families and your jobs, and they did. I am sure it was not their first contact with Jesus, so their decision was probably not so instant and immediate. Even so, consider what they gave up to follow Christ!

How has God chosen us? The answer is love, *"God loved the world so much..."* Does God not therefore call us all? Yet, the choice to follow or to love has not been taken away. The call is

given in love and freedom, and God expects our response also to be one of love.

So love is offered to all, a love we have not chosen, for it came through Christ, the friend, who gave his life for ours. And it is this same love that retains our choice to accept the gift or leave it for another time. God's love never goes away. It is always there; waiting.

I am sure that God does not always like us, but he loves us. Even when life seems to fall apart, when we are at our most angry, distressed or vulnerable, God loves us. When we feel distant from God, he never leaves us. His call to us never goes away.

One example of that love is the work of Christian Aid and our support for such work is fruit that endures, it is literally 'life before death'. We might not be able to do much, but it is one way of giving our lives for others. *"This then is what I command you: love one another"*. Amen