

David's Sermon for 25th October 2020 I Thess 21:8 Matt 22:34-end
(Which is the greatest commandment?)

Pam and I spent last weekend in a cottage just north of Keswick. We were able to do that because Debby kindly swapped Sunday duties with me. Thank you Debby – we had a wonderful time.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus tells the Pharisees that the first commandment is to love God.

He even explains what that love should be "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind."

When you're spending time in the Lake District, it's very easy to find God and to love God.

The majestic scenery coupled with the autumn colours not only speak of God but actually shout his name in capital letters.

Who can fail to be consumed by awe and wonder as God's creation holds our hearts with both hands as we catch a glimpse of the architect herself. (herself.....)

And we know in that moment that God is reaching into our very soul and awakening in us his gift of appreciation.

Our response, it seems to me, can only be **to love the God who created such majesty**, and then placed us gently in its midst, so that we can be reduced to tears of joy by such grandeur.

It was even a joy to have to stop the car and wait for the sheep to decide to move, and I never thought I'd hear myself say that.

Of course it reminded me of the beautiful surroundings in which we live here in Yorkshire and which I can so easily take for granted.

Of the God we find peeping at us through the beautiful sunsets and sunrises we've enjoyed recently.

We are as surrounded by God as a fish is surrounded by the ocean.

It reminded me of the story of Jesus being spotted in York and when asked what he was doing there he said he was working from home.

Of course not everyone in the world can take a holiday in the Lake District.

Not everyone can appreciate God in nature, God in their own surroundings, for all sorts of reasons.

Civil war, disease, famine, oppression, refugees, asylum seekers, poverty.....

As Julie pointed out to us in her sermon a couple of weeks ago, we are amongst the most comfortable 8% in the world.

Which is why must pray for those less fortunate than ourselves, and bring hope in practical ways as with our harvest giving to the Welcome Centre raising over £400, and our recent appeal for the refugees on Lesbos which has raised the wonderful sum of £776 thanks to your generosity.

Hopefully the people who make up the 92% less comfortable than ourselves can recognise God in one another, in their faith, in our giving, in support from aid agencies and so help them to keep their faith alive.

Which of course they do.

In fact the comfort that puts us in the 8% can easily become a barrier to finding God and loving God, whereas those with fewer material benefits can have a much closer sense of God and relationship with God.

And we do well to reflect on that.

"Love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind."

So in the same Gospel passage, Jesus tells the Pharisees that the second commandment is this "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"

At first glance we can fall into the trap of thinking – "well of course we do that – love our neighbour as ourselves" But do we?

You'll remember on one occasion the Pharisees asked Jesus – well then who is my neighbour, and in answering, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan.

Samaritans were hated by the Jews but Jesus put the Samaritan centre stage when answering the question “Who is my neighbour?”

That stopped them in their tracks and made them think.

Hopefully it stops us in our tracks and makes us think.

3 to 400 years before Jesus was born the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle decided between them that the world should be seen as a hierarchy.

Like a pyramid where humans were at the top because we are sentient beings, we can reason and have feelings. Plants and animals were in the middle and inorganic materials, rocks and metals and the like, were at the bottom. So three tier systems aren't new are they, by any means.

Amazingly enough that three tier hierarchical view of the world has remained largely unchanged right up to the present day.

With the exception perhaps of creating a supreme tier where the white human beings reside. Especially of course, during colonial times.

Even that adjustment still remains to this day in some quarters, perhaps in all quarters to one degree or another.

Let's just suppose for a moments that those philosophers had taken a different view.

Let's suppose that they had decided there was no hierarchy.

Suppose they had decided that all elements of God's creation were of equal value.

Does this sound to have a ring of Celtic spirituality about it? Does it sound like the beliefs of indigenous people?

Who would be our neighbour then?

Would it be people of every race and creed?

Would it be indigenous people?

Would it include the Orangutan? The mountain gorilla?

The elephant, the rhino, the whales and dolphins?

With the exception of meteor strikes and ice ages, we humans have been responsible for virtually every extinction on the planet.

If we're not very careful, we shall become responsible for our own.

Just reflect for a moment if Jesus was asked the question today “Who is my neighbour?”

Might he reply “The whole of my Father's creation”

Then the second of the great commandments would be ***yourself.***

“love the whole of creation as

How can we claim to love God with all our heart and mind and strength if we destroy His creation?

The very thing that provides us with awe and wonder, the very thing that connects us with God.

The very thing that provides for our every need and want.

In a month's time I hope to be holding my newest grandchild

My new grandson

His birth will be a miracle and a priceless gift from God.

When I hold him I know that my feelings of love for him will be beyond measure, without limits.

Just close your eyes for a moment and imagine the feelings of unimaginable love you had the last time you held a new born baby

Aren't we called to love the whole of creation with that same limitless love?

Isn't the whole of creation is our neighbour?

Doesn't that then mean that loving God and loving our neighbour becomes one and the same thing?

Now there's a thought for the day!