

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

14th May 2023 – Sixth Sunday after Easter

John 14:15-21

FAITH-FULL IN LOVE AND OBEDIENCE

‘Love’. It’s a word which we hear and use a lot, isn’t it, in so many different ways. We use it to describe how we feel about the people we are closest to in our lives, and God Himself, but it can also be used to describe our feelings towards ice cream, a sporting team, a sunny day. What are some words that you would use to describe ‘love’, or that for you go with ‘love’? (*allow responses*) It is an interesting word, because on the one hand it has a pretty basic meaning for us all, but the object of our ‘love’ and how we express it can also be different for each of us. Here is a wordle which I prepared, or googled, earlier. Like the examples we put up, the words used here show just how varied this word ‘love’, how it expresses itself, how it comes out, can be for each of us.

And I’m pretty sure that if you asked people to find one word to sum up today, Mother’s Day, for many that word would be ‘love’. A mother’s love for her child or children is one of the great examples of love we have in the world. This is a natural, instinctive, emotion and action, which is held not just by human mothers but many mothers among living creatures. It’s a love which is generous, giving, sacrificial, long-suffering. When we think of the love of a mother, we might think of what they put aside themselves for the sake of their children. And Mother’s Day is also about love because it is about the love we show back to our mothers. It’s the day retailers love, the best day of the year for florists, the biggest day of phone calls for the year, because so many of us want to show by our actions how much we love our mothers. So, it’s the day when restaurants are busy, and parks are packed with picnickers, because, as we know we are loved by them, we want to show back how much we love them also.

There’s another way that love is expressed, which we often do, but which we don’t often talk about, or perhaps even think about. And that is through obedience. Not always a word we associate

with our mothers, is it? But think about it. We know that our mothers tell us to not run out on the road, to eat our veges, change our underwear, get enough sleep, all of those things because they love us and they want what is best for us. When we are young, many of us can probably remember doing what mum said because we had a fear of the consequences if we didn't. But as we get older, make our own decisions, perhaps move away as we start our own lives, even no longer have our mothers with us in these lives, we find ourselves doing many of the things they told us to do because we know they were taught to us in love as what is best for us, and we have found, sometimes through hard experience, that they were right. And so, out of love for them, and respect in knowing they told us what is best for us, even without them around and without fear of punishment, we do what they said, or we 'obey' them.

It is sometimes said that the best earthly example we have of God's love for us is the love of a parent for a child, and that is certainly something we can remember on Mother's Day. And on this day as well as thanking God for giving us people like our mothers to love and care for us, and thinking about how their selfless and sacrificial love reflects God's love, the way we often come to see that our mothers know what is best for us and so we 'obey' them in response, also gives us an insight into what Jesus is saying in our Bible reading for today, about obeying Him coming out of our love for Him. It is pretty plain here, isn't it? In verse 15, 'If you love me, you will do as I command'. And then at the end in verse 21, 'If you love me, you will do what I have said, and my Father will love you. I will also love you and show you what I am like'. A part of love for Jesus, for God, is obedience. It's an obedience which is not driven by a fear of punishment, because obedience like that is limited; it only exists for as long as we fear the punishment. And really, in relation to both our mothers and to God, an obedience based on fear is not what is really wanted, because it doesn't reflect the kind of relationship those who love us want to have with us.

An obedience which comes from love, and is based on love, is about trust, and gratitude, about willingly responding and obeying, because that is both more effective and long lasting, and it also

reflects the relationship Jesus is saying He wants with us here. In the chapter before this Jesus tells His disciples that He gives them a new commandment, to love each other as I have love you. (*John 13:34*) It is a command, Jesus is telling us to obey it, but not in an ‘or else...’, kind of way, but, ‘and so ...’. And that comes out in this reading again here: ‘Then you will know I am one with the Father. You will know you are one with me, and I am one with you.’ (v. 20) Jesus wants us to do what He is saying because then we can have the faith He wants to give us, the faith which comes through the Spirit, the faith which helps us to know that we are never alone, but that God in His love is with us always.

In receiving God’s love, and trying to live our lives in the way He lays down for us, we are then open to receiving the blessings He wants to give us, including the gift of faith which enables to know God’s love and presence in our lives. We can think about this in terms of the “great commandments” to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind’, and to, ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. A bit like we do so many of the things our mothers taught us without thinking about them, we might also be trying to live out these commands in ways that we often don’t even think about. And in doing that, in doing what Jesus says here and obeying Him, what difference does that make to our lives? To how we think and act? To what we put our priorities on, what we worry about? To how we treat others? To how we try to serve God, both directly and by serving others? To where we look for help when we are struggling with life? To what we ultimately put our faith in? In loving God, in responding to His love in what we think, say, and do, we open ourselves up to receiving His blessings as we live our lives of faith and love in Him.

Or, think about it in terms of a quote I found this week: Obedience to God is an expression of our love for God. How does that sit with you? What does it look like for you? How easy do find this to do in your life? If you like, take a bit of time to stop and reflect on that: Obedience to God is an expression of our love for God. We often shy away from talking about ‘obedience’ in relation to God, because we know that our relationship with Him is all about love, and grace, and forgiveness.

But obedience in the way Jesus talks about it here doesn't go against those things, it doesn't take us back to the view of a fierce and judging God which Martin Luther taught against in the Reformation. We obey because we know God loves us, and so in following the ways He has laid down for us we both express our love for Him, and we know we are living in the way which makes us open to receiving all the blessings He wants to give us. In obeying, we show our love, and we both show and receive our faith so that everything God wants to give us can now be ours.

All of the flowers and gifts which are given, the phone calls which are made, the ways that love is expressed to mothers on this day, are not done because we remember our mothers in fear as people who had to be obeyed, but because, overall, we did what they said, and still do in many ways, because we know they told us to do those things because they love us. When Jesus in particular, and the Bible in general, tells us to obey His commands, we know that is so we can receive the blessings He wants to give us and to live the lives He wants for us. We receive God's love, in the faith He gives us we try to live each day following the way He has laid down for us, so that in our lives and our relationship with Him we have that faith which keeps us strong and close to Him. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Think about your relationship with your mother. If it was/is a good and loving relationship, thank God for that and all the blessings you have received from it. If it was/is not so good, pray for healing for hurts felt, and if it is possible, for reconciliation.
- While 'love' and 'obey' don't often go together in the way we use them, they are often paired together in the Bible. What is meant by 'obey' in the way it is used here and elsewhere in the Bible? In what ways can we see it as a positive word, and not in the negative sense we might often focus on?
- We obey God in love not because we fear His punishment, but because we want to be open to receiving His blessings. How does this affect how we follow God and serve others? How does it affect the decisions we make, how we treat people, what we say? In making the decision to 'obey' God how do we come to experience His blessings and love more?

Pray: thank God for our mothers and the love they show to their children. Thank God for His love for us, and ask Him to help us to respond to His love by following His way.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
14.05.2023*