

*<sup>9</sup>"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup>I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>17</sup>This is my command: Love each other.*

*John 15:9-17*

Last week we looked at our vision for 2010 and especially focused on the wider context of this passage of Jesus' analogy of the vine and the branches. Our vision for 2010 is Rooting Deeply Now, Branching Widely Now. And our verse for the year is this:

<sup>8</sup>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

John 15:8

One aspect of bearing fruit is outreach which is part of our vision for 2010. Growing wider and growing fruit is a sign of a healthy branch. We often think of fruitfulness as meaning new Christians. I certainly don't want to take anything away from that, outreach is our main focus this year and what we feel God is calling us to. But if we are to see spiritual growth in others then there first needs to be spiritual growth in us. We need to have the fruit of the vine growing in our lives as well as seeking to see it in the lives of others. Healthy fruit can only grow from healthy branches.

Jesus said "if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you will bear much fruit". There is an emphasis here on our relationship with Jesus. The importance of being connected to the vine. If we are connected to the vine, that should show in our lives.

- I saw an experiment done once where a flower was put in a vase of coloured water. To begin with the flower was white but after a few days the petals of the flower started to take on the colour of the water. As the flower took in the water to grow, it also took on some of the characteristics of the water. In other words, what the flower was taking in to make it grow, what was running through its veins, started to show on the outside.

In a similar way, what we are rooted in will run through us and whether we are rooted in God or not will eventually start to show. If we are branches that are attached to the vine that is Jesus then in order to grow healthy fruit we need to have the life of Jesus running through our veins. Then it seems only natural that we will start to show something of Jesus in our lives, just like the flower began to take on the characteristics of the coloured water. When we are connected to the vine we should see some of the characteristics of Jesus displayed in our lives.

One of the greatest characteristics of Jesus' life and ministry is love. Love for God and love for others. If there is one characteristic that we might say shines out above all others in the life of Jesus, it is love. So if we have the life of Jesus running through our veins, we should also show love.

## Love for God.

In the previous chapter Jesus explains to his disciples the close relationship that he has with his father:

“How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup>Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. <sup>11</sup>Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

John 14:9-11

In the passage we are looking at this morning Jesus applies that close relationship to his disciples telling them that he no longer calls them servants but friends. This term has a strong meaning when we think of this as being applied to Jesus and being a friend of God. It is a tremendous privilege. It was a term that was applied to Abraham and to Moses and now Jesus calls his disciples ‘friends’. He points out that they are in a privileged position. As friends he has shared with them the things he has learnt from the Father. He has shared knowledge of God with them, knowledge of the kingdom of heaven and knowledge of his mission and purpose. This is privileged revelation of the things of God. These are privileges not of servants, but of co-workers, companions, friends.

With greater privilege comes greater responsibility. This is true of all manner of things in life and it is true of the privilege to be called a friend of Jesus. Jesus makes it clear that as friends who have these privileges, there is also a responsibility to obey his commands. Again, Jesus is the example that we can model ourselves on. We are to obey Jesus’ commands just as he obeys his Father’s commands.

<sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

John 15:10

This demonstrates our love for God. Quite clearly Jesus says:

<sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command.

John 15:14

If we go back just one chapter to John 14, we see these words again:

<sup>23</sup>Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Isn't that a lovely phrase just there, “we will come to him and make our home with him”. Again, this sense of a close relationship with God. Then the reverse side of this:

<sup>24</sup>He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

John 14:22-24

Obedience is therefore a very important part of our relationship with God. It is an important characteristic of the fruit that should be in our lives if we are connected to the vine. If you love someone you try to do the things that make them happy. You try to do what they ask you to do.

What we feel God is asking us to do as a church this year is outreach. This must also be done in love. Love is important for our ministry. The apostle Paul tells us:

<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues<sup>[a]</sup> of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,<sup>[b]</sup> but have not love, I gain nothing.

Paul says you can be a fantastic charismatic preacher, you can have amazing wisdom, even the faith to move a mountain and the courage to endure persecution. But if these things are done without love, they are useless. We can hold fantastic outreach events but if we do them without love for God, love for one another and love for the world, our efforts are worthless.

If we are connected to the vine with the life of Jesus running through us then love should be in everything we do, just as it was in everything that Jesus did. In other words our ministry should be modelled on his ministry, should reflect his ministry.

Jesus said:

<sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command.

Jesus has a clear command for us here and it is to love one another. It is repeated twice to ensure that we don't miss it:

<sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

<sup>17</sup>This is my command: Love each other.

Our love for one another is very important, it is a command from Jesus, this is something that we must do. Jesus has already stressed that if we love him, we will do as he asks. He then says, this is what I ask, love each other. Isn't that just typical of Jesus?

If we go back just a little way to John 13:34, Jesus again says to his disciples:

<sup>34</sup>"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:34-35

Jesus said that having love for each other is how we demonstrate that we are his disciples. It's the same principle again; Jesus had love for others so if we demonstrate love for others, we also demonstrate that we are Jesus' disciples.

What is love for one another?

Some children's answers:

“Love is when my mummy makes a coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure it tastes ok”

“Love is when mummy gives daddy the best piece of chicken”

“Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you’ve left him alone all day”

When I was at Spurgeon’s there was a notice in the shower that was based on John 13:34-35. It said:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. When you have finished in the shower, please clean it out removing all soap scum, redundant body parts and shampoo bottles. By this all men will know that you are my disciples.”

Love is not always thinking about ourselves but thinking about other people. It’s about putting ourselves out for someone else, not because we will get something out of it, but because the other person will benefit.

One of the values we have in this church is “BELONGING”. It is one of our aims that people feel they belong here as part of the family. I know that this is the way that many of you do feel. This church has a particularly strong sense of family and belonging. One of the reasons that we encourage people to become members of this church is to give you a greater sense of belonging. As you make that commitment to the church, the church also makes a commitment to you and we do things together in partnership. You’re involved in the decision making of the church, which, as a Baptist Church, that’s an important part of who we are. We are a family doing things together. Being a family of course has its problems. Brothers and sisters tend to fight with each other from time to time. Christian households are certainly no exception to that and neither are brothers and sisters in Christ. Some people we find easier to love than others don’t we. Of course we always blame the other person – “if only they would stop being so selfish and do things my way”.

The passage I touched on earlier where Paul talks about love to the Corinthians can be used as a test for us to see if it really is the other person who lacks love or if it’s actually us who lack love.

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 3:4-7

The passage goes on a bit further but that’s enough of a challenge isn’t it. As a test to see if you lack love in your dealings with others, try putting your own name in the place of the words “love” every time it appears in this passage:

e.g. [Darren] is patient, [Darren] is kind, [Darren] does not envy, [Darren] does not boast....

I find that very challenging. Do we have patience with one another or are we sometimes a little intolerant when others don’t do things the way that we would do it? Are we envious of others? Do we get easily angered by others? – some people get right up our nose don’t they? Do we show patience and grace, or do we get angry? What about keeping records of wrongs. When we feel someone has wronged us, do we let it go or do we hold on to it? It may be possible in love to use

the things others have done to us as a tool with which to shape ourselves, but how often do we think to ourselves “right, I shall remember that. That’s going in my armoury and one day when you moan at me, I’ll get it back out and shoot you down with it.” That’s not love, that’s revenge. That’s not protecting and preserving our brothers and sisters, that’s destroying them.

Love is not something to be taken lightly, real love is a real challenge. Even so, if we are disciples of Jesus Christ then his command is to love one another and we should try to show one another love as often as we possibly can.

I heard a story of an old couple who used to play a little game. They would leave little notes for one another to find which said “SHMILY”. No one else knew what this meant but sometimes the grandchildren would open the fridge and see “SHMILY” and would ask “Granddad, what does ‘SHMILY’ mean” – “oh, that’s just a note for your grandma” Granddad would reply. The notes were left everywhere. If Granddad had to go out early he would try not to disturb Gran and would leave a note on his pillow saying “SHMILY”. Gran would sometimes put Granddads clothes in his draw and would leave a note on top saying “SHMILY”. “SHMILY” would appear in the tea caddy, written in the steam on the mirror. Once Gran even unrolled a whole roll of toilet paper to write “SHMILY” on the last sheet. Sadly Gran died and on top of her coffin was a bunch of flowers from Granddad, which had a note attached which read “SHMILY”. Granddad turned to his grandson and said “you always used to ask me what ‘SHMILY’ meant – It was a way your gran and I used to remind one another that we loved each other - it means “see how much I love you”.

Jesus demonstrated his love for us when he took our place on the cross. Jesus said:

<sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

When he took our place on the cross, he did it in complete and utter love for you and for me. And though his words were few, his actions said loud and clear “see how much I love you”.

<sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.