

Reflection for 6th Sunday of Easter by Rev'd Peter Shaw

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Dear Friends,

In this most beautiful passage from John's Gospel, Jesus talks about love, His love for His disciples, that they must love both Him and each other and by extension, all others with whom they come into contact. Love is a word that can have confused meanings and connotations in the English language, so I just want to set the record straight by defining what Jesus means when he talks about love.

Love is a word which covers a number of human emotions and relations. In English we just have the one word – Love. In Greek there are seven words, yes seven, that describe it, but the ones that concern us here are;

Philia, meaning deep authentic friendship. ...

Agape, meaning love for everyone, an empathetic, universal love.

It is these two forms of love that Jesus is referring to in our passage today as opposed to another Greek word for love - **Eros** - which means sexual love or passion and from which we get the word erotic.

Just for the record, the other words for love in Greek are:

Ludus: playful love

Pragma: longstanding love

Philautia: love of the self.

Storge: unconditional, familial love.

And with that, I will end my brief lesson on the Greek language!

So, what is Jesus saying to His disciples in our passage and what messages are there for us?

The central words of this passage are those in which Jesus says that his disciples have not chosen him but he has chosen them. It is not we who chose God but God who, in his grace approaches us with a call and an offer made out of his love.

So what are we called to do, what are we chosen for?

We are chosen for joy, to radiate joy, however hard we might find our lives as Christians. We have a lot to be joyful about; joy in following God and walking with Jesus in our everyday lives at all times and knowing and experiencing God's love in whatever life throws at us to name but a few. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than non-believers seeing Christians with long faces, leading joyless unhappy lives.

We are chosen for love. As Christians we are sent out into the world to love one another not to be in dispute with one another, quarrel or even fight with one another. As Christians we need to live in such a way that we practice loving our neighbours. Many Christians tell people to love each other even when their whole lives are a demonstration that Love is the last thing they practice, in direct conflict with Jesus' example and sacrifice for all of us on the Cross.

Jesus calls us to be his friends. Here he offers us an intimacy with God. The idea of being a friend of God also has a background in Isaiah 41 Abraham was the friend of God. In Wisdom 7, wisdom is said to make people the friends of God.

Jesus calling us to be his friends and the friends of God is a tremendous offer, meaning that we do not have to have a remote relationship with God. Jesus gives us this intimacy with God so that He is no longer a distant stranger but a close friend.

Jesus has given us the honour of asking us to assist Him in His task of bringing His love to a sometimes very dark and hostile world; He has opened his heart to us. The tremendous choice laid before us as Christians is that we can accept or refuse assisting Christ in the work of leading the world to God. God as any true loving parent would, has given us a free will with which he hopes we will decide to follow Him through Jesus Christ.

Indeed, God does not choose us to live a life retired from the world but to represent Him in the world through following Jesus. That must be the daily focus and rhythm of our lives.

We are chosen to go out to bear fruit and by being true Christians, to spread Christianity. The way to bring others into the Christian faith is to show them the joyful fruits of the Christian life by our example. We are sent out not to argue people into Christianity, still less to threaten them into it but to attract them into it, so by our lives it is apparent that the fruits of being a Christian are so wonderful and joyful that others will be attracted.

When we pray it must be in the name of Christ. We cannot pray for things of which we know that Jesus would disapprove. Whenever we try to turn prayer into something to enable us to realise our own earthly ambitions and to satisfy our own desires it is ineffective, for it is not prayer at all.

Essentially with prayer we must say to God your will be done and when we pray we must realise that we can never know better than God his will for us in this life. So often real prayer must be not that God would send us the things we wish but that he would make us able to accept the things he wills. We must never in prayer pray as if nobody but ourselves mattered.

With all this, there are quite a few matters to think about relating to how we lead our lives as Christians. Some of them may appear daunting, but as Christians today, in our mission of trying to lead others to God, we do need to look at them and examine our own lives to see how we are “doing” as true Christians

And there is great joy ahead!

Take it from me that the joy we will get from following God’s will for us, will much more than make up, for what we feel we have lost. We must go forward prayerfully with our Faith, trusting in God and must not look back. **Amen**