



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus said, Love one another as I have loved you.

St John 15. 9-17

Sunday 5 May

How many songs have been sung? 'If music be the food of love, then play on' is the opening line spoken by Duke Orsino in Shakespeare's play 'Twelfth Night'. That was a comedy, where all went well, and true love won out, with a happy ending. However, the 'star-crossed lovers' in his 'Romeo and Juliet' did not have such a happy ending. We might get confused as to what love is all about, because we each have different experiences, or even yearnings, about love.

Part of this is because we only have the one word in English – love. In Greek, the language of the New Testament, two in particular are used by Jesus, out of the 8 that were available. These two define what we mean by 'love' – and what he means by love. These are 'agapaō' and 'phileō'. It's probably too confusing to consider the other words, so we will just have to cope with a broad-brush definition.

'Phileō' is the more general form of love; an affection, tenderness and warmth. It is the word Jesus used when he said we were to love one another.

What does Jesus mean?

- How do we 'love' – neighbour, God, self?
- Is it possible to love everyone, even those who consider 'evil'?
- Who loves you?
- How is their love shown?

When Jesus is commanding to love, he uses that word 'phileō'. Yet when he speaks of his, or God's love for us, he uses the word 'agapaō'. This not because St John is being inconsistent, or changing words around for variety's sake, but because he is making an important point. At the end of his gospel, Jesus asks Peter three times: Do you love me? Three times Peter had betrayed Jesus at his trial, declaring that he did not know him.

In his questioning of Peter about Peter's love for him, Jesus uses 'agapaō' in the first two occasions, before reverting to 'phileō'. This because it is only the supremacy and totality of God's love which is expressed in 'agapaō', an unconditional and complete love which is unattainable, initially by us humans. It was this love that led Jesus to be born, to die and to rise, so we may think that it is beyond us. Jesus toned down his questions of Peter, but his desire is that we shall move from the basic form of love to that which is the love we should have for him and God.

- Which is the sort of love you and for whom?
- Is it possible to move into a deeper form of loving relationship and how?
- Does Jesus expect the impossible of Peter, of us?
- Should our love for one another be restricted to just one form, or not?
- How would you like to be loved?

When we want to know what love is all about, then rather than songs, stories, TV or films, the only real example of love is in the New Testament. The other common word for love in Greek is 'eros' and that is the sort of love that we immediately associate with our solitary word with its host of meanings. And we can corrupt love and use it as a means of control than liberation, of abuse rather than support. Again the prime example of authentic loving is in the New Testament. One of Jesus' few commands is to love one another, qualified by the assurance of his love for us. Let us move in our love from being warm and comfortable to ardent and self-giving.