

Sermon Easter 5 2013 Year C

Psalms 148

Acts 11: 1-18

John 10: 22-30

Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.

Today we celebrate – and that is the right word – those people who offer themselves for service as wardens and Select Vestry members to the churches. We thank them. And not only them, but also those who were prepared to offer themselves for election.

In days gone by it may have been the case that serving on the Select Vestry was seen as a sign that a person was highly regarded by the community. That may still be the case. But it is more the case that serving on the Select Vestry is work. It is no easy task. There are jobs to be done, decisions to be made, legal responsibilities to bear, laws to be adhered to. The days of 'we've always done it that way' have gone, replaced by guidelines and legal requirements. So on behalf of all of us I thank you for your willingness to serve. This last year has seen the Select Vestry having to deal with unpleasant issues that I hope will not be repeated. This next year will see the Vestry having to deal with Maryborough School building. We hope that the church building can look after itself this year, and the Rectory too, now that the roof is done. And of course there are the routine day by day and week by week tasks that keep the wheels turning.

I got into trouble at the EGV for mentioning some names but not others, and I resolve therefore that at next year's EGV I will mention no names. I am going to mention some today. Raymond Little is standing down as Rector's Churchwarden. You should appreciate what a treasure PL church has in this man. His pastoral skills and antennae are second to none. I am delighted to say that he is on the SV, and also that he's agreed to my appointing him Pastoral coordinator. I welcome Denzil in his place as rector's churchwarden. Brain Frarey has stood down at the Rock, and has been replaced as glebewarden by Shane Reynolds. The other wardens continue as last year, Florrie, David, Anne, and I'm delighted that they are in office. John Culbert and Jean Dobson are elected to the SV this year, Jean needing and deserving a break. John is someone whose business and common sense I can't do without, so I've appointed him assistant Glebewarden, and he will attend SV meetings. There are two other people whose expertise will be especially useful: Rosemary Day and Syd Finlay, who are serving on the group looking at the future of the Maryborough site.

What I want to see is a *ministry of all the talents*, and that includes all of us. Just because you're not on the SV doesn't mean you can't offer your own enthusiasms. Please do. If you have an idea, don't keep it to yourself, but tell one of the Wardens, or Raymond, or me. We already have musicians, readers, intercessors, chalice assistants, decorators. But there is always room for more, and don't feel that what you have to offer is too insignificant to matter. Nothing is too insignificant, and everything matters.

A *ministry of all the talents* encourages us to reach outside ourselves, to forget ourselves, in the service of something bigger. It moves us on. Stasis means stuck, immobile. Moving on is ec-stasis. When we forget ourselves in the service of something bigger we begin to enter ecstasy. That is one of the messages of the crucifixion/resurrection: the action of Jesus, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross. The ultimate ecstasy with its mixture of awful pain and delightful pleasure. That is for us all: God has to unsettle us into ecstasy, to get us moving from what holds us in stoppage or inactivity. Peter, thrice denied the Lord, was moved on to look after the sheep. Nobody is to be excluded. In Christ there is no east or west or north or south. "There's a wideness in God's mercy' that is not constrained by human will.

A ministry of all the talents requires that we include others too. There are young members of the C of I in town who sometimes come to church. There are others who never come to church. Some have tried, and have been put off by hearing others gossip about them – 'who are they?', 'they're from the estate', 'that's not a Church of Ireland name' and so on. Most of these comments are innocent, and we all want to place other people into a context, a pigeonhole, but let's be sensitive about how we do it. Let's be mindful. Make no mistake, the church needs them if it is to survive and grow. The church needs us all, of every age. Nobody is excluded, nobody whatsoever.

We are told to love. Service to something bigger is part of love. Love is not an emotion, a feeling. Love is a decision. It is hard work. I asked some of the Maryborough children on Friday for some other words that we

can use to expand the meaning of the word 'love'. They said, like, share, care for, compassion, warn. They are absolutely right. Greek words:

- charis. charity, care.
- agape. general affection; feelings for a good meal, your children, our spouse. Being content. Self-sacrificing, giving love to all, both friend and enemy.
- philia. friendship, dispassionate, virtuous love. Loyalty, enjoyment of an activity.

Note that the children said: warn. Not allowing people to do what they like, but to warn. My ordination vow includes the word admonish, I am required to admonish you. And I do.

There's another Greek word for love, and that is eros. This means passionate love, with desire and longing, a desire for wholeness, appreciation of the beauty. This is part of Christian love too. And that includes sexual longing – read the Song of Solomon if you doubt that.

So the people we celebrate today are examples of service – that is love in action. The action that takes us out of ourselves, that transforms our existence from the narcissism of me me me to the ecstasy of us us us.

We're all in this together.

ALMIGHTY God, the giver of all good gifts, who of thy divine providence hast appointed divers Orders in thy Church: Give thy grace, we humbly beseech thee, to all those called to any office and administration in the same; and so replenish them with the truth of thy doctrine, and endue them with innocency of life, that they may faithfully serve before thee, to the glory of thy great Name, and the benefit of thy holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.