

Being Kind

I was amazed when one of the key statements from our Prime Minister before lockdown was "Be kind!" During lockdown it became a mantra adopted by all and everyone. While we faced this scary pandemic, we were told to be kind to each other. When a couple of weeks ago Jacinda Ardern was forced to come on television to again announce COVID level restrictions she repeated her appeal to the nation to be kind. Paul would cry Amen to this. In the letter to the Romans he asks that they love one another. But he could have said, be kind.

Paul begins this passage by asking that his readers let love be genuine (verse 9). The love we should show as Christians is a real love born of the love we receive from God. We've probably all had people show concern in what they say but it doesn't show in their eyes. It is just words. Even worse are those whose words show caring while their actions deny that there is any compassion. It's not easy. I know sometimes I have felt I should be concerned but in reality, I just don't feel it inside. Paul is saying to us get over it and get to know each other that we truly care. In 1 John it says, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God ...Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love". If we don't genuinely have love for each other then we need to get to know God better for God loves us and can indeed fill us with that love.

Paul calls on us to "Love each other with mutual affection". One of the great things is of course that while we are urged to give this love and affection, we are also able to receive that support from those of our Church family. I recently have started a course of OT and Physio. When ACC contacted me to set this the person asked what my supports were. I, of course, mentioned Gwyn but quite quickly I thought of the church folk who had visited, prayed and helped me through the last few months. When things go well, we tend to be the one giving and then when things turn for the worse, we find the surround love of others upholding us. We have all received love from those in the direst of situations. I suppose it is true that there is never a time to stop loving.

Paul even says we should "Outdo each other in showing honour". It is not a competition where there is a prize to be won. But Paul wants us working at loving one another and seeing the kindness in others should spur us on to follow suit, even do more.

Following his injunction to love, Paul instructs us to hate what is evil. I suppose this is the part of the verse that gives me most concern. How often have you seen Christian people speaking firm on issues but it ends in judgement and division? There are times we must speak out for justice, for truth and for our faith. But the command to love one another does not get overruled and should never be ignored. We must be careful that in "hating evil" we don't condemn and exclude others because God's love is for all. Paul's last injunction, in this verse, probably keeps us on track. "Hold fast to what is good". Focusing on all that is good draws us back to the mutual affection despite our differences. At the end of the passage Paul tells us

to keep our focus positive, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”.

This loving kindness is not to be a wishy-washy Valentines card kind of thing. It is not just a feeling of the moment and gone the next. “Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord”. When Jacinda told us to be kind she was telling us to think about the other person. Don’t just think of yourself, your family or your interests. Paul would agree but he is saying it is not something casual. It is something to work at to have a spirit led attitude that serves God by actively striving for love to fill this world

The Contemporary English Version translates verse 11 this way “Never give up - Eagerly follow the Holy Spirit and serve the Lord”. We know that God is with us through these difficult months. That is not to say we won’t feel anxious, fearful of the future or even depressed. But God is with us and God’s love is shared by our mutual affection. Through each other we see God in action. God’s love at work We are called to follow and take up our cross. May we not be too slow to respond to God’s call but eagerly follow our Lord. As we go into God’s world may our love be genuine.

Be Kind!