

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020  
Trinity 12

Love one another with mutual affection

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There's not been much on tv lately. I guess that's because actors can't get together to act and it's difficult to make engaging tv when you have to socially distance. In the vicarage we have taken to watching box sets, catching up on all those series we thought would be good to watch or others have said were good yet we hadn't had time to see.

We started a new one this week. Its not what one might call light entertainment: *The Handmaid's Tale*. As I am sure many of you know it is based on the book of the same title by Margaret Atwood. It is the story of a woman surviving in what has become a repressive, violent and coercive dystopian society basing itself on redacted religious teachings. We have not finished it yet, only being able to watch it a few episodes at a time, yet already one can see how easily those in power could manipulate teachings to bring about their own aims and objectives.

Of course, if we think this is just possible in fictional reality think again. There have been occasions in human history when faith has been used by the powerful to garner support and to vindicate actions. In the Presidential Elections of the USA both sides use selective views of Christianity to support their policies and to gain votes. Some suggest that, although Hitler's regime wasn't religious and that should they have been successful in the Second World War would probably have attempted to eradicate faith they still attempted to gather particularly protestant support with the formation of the Protestant Reich Church.

In both fictional and historical context a word is missing. It is redacted from the texts and vision of society. It has been written out because it does not serve the forces of oppression, as it speaks only to truth; and that word is love.

Paul often exhorts his readers to love. For Paul love is at the heart of the Christian life. The love Paul calls the faithful to is challenging and asks a lot of us. In the opposition of Nazism love called many to suffering, even death either

fighting from within such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer; as a resistor such as Max Kolbe or the many who took up arms against it and died for our freedom.

Peter gets into trouble in today's Gospel passage. Just previously he had declared Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Now, as Jesus explains to the disciples what this means, that the Son of Man must suffer and die Peter objects, offering to defend Jesus. Peter has misunderstood. It is in love Jesus takes his ministry to its conclusion; that it is in this love that the power and wonder of God's love for all creation is revealed. It may seem nonsensical but it is to be through the cross and the empty tomb of Easter that the power and wonder of God's love for us all is made real. It is here that the salvation of the world is proclaimed.

This is the love Paul proclaims. Love that does change the world, not to a dystopian nightmare but a place of light and truth, healing and hope, fulfilment and freedom. It is a love proclaimed by Jesus through his teaching that does not judge and does not pay evil for evil, it turns cheeks and gives clothes. This love feeds the hungry without asking why they are hungry, clothes the naked without asking why are they naked.

This is the love we are called to in our Christian faith. It is challenging, even at times difficult, yet love must be the way we travel through life. In this twenty first century it might not take us to martyrdom. It does mean we must lead the way that shows we are here for others. What that means for each season differs. In this season it is showing care for our neighbour; supporting them when they cannot leave the house. Understanding when they struggle with mask wearing, social distancing or isolation.