

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
17th May 2022**

READINGS

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant;
save the child of your serving-maid. Show me a sign of your favour,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Psalm 86:15-17 (NRSV)

When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:31-35 (NRSV)

So, we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

1 John 4:16-21 (NRSV)

REFLECTION

I am a great collector of stories. I have gathered many, many over the years. I find some stories endearing, some challenging, some moving. I have used them for personal inspiration and also as illustrations in sermons or talks, even in church magazines and articles for local newspapers. And I have shared some of those stories over the months through these weekly devotions. This week I want to share another story with you, it is a favourite of mine, told by a school teacher:

"One Friday, things just didn't feel right in class. We had worked hard on a new concept all week, and I sensed that the students were frowning, frustrated with themselves--and edgy with one another. I had to stop this crankiness before it got out of hand. So, I asked them to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name. Then I told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down. It took the remainder of the class period to finish the assignment, and as the students left the room, each one handed me the papers. That Saturday, I wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and I listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday I gave each student his or her list. Before long, the entire class was smiling. "Really?" I heard whispered. "I never knew that meant anything to anyone!" "I didn't know others liked me so much!" No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. I never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another again.

Several years later, after I returned from holiday, my parents met me at the airport. As we were driving home, Mother asked me the usual questions about the trip--the weather, my experiences in general. There was a slight lull in the conversation. My mother gave Dad a sideways glance and I simply said, "Dad?" My father cleared his throat as he usually did before something important. "A family called last night," he began. "One of your old students, Mark Erkland, from a few years ago, has been killed in a car crash. The funeral is tomorrow, and his parents would like it if you could attend."

After the funeral, everyone headed to back to the family home for the funeral tea. Mark's mother and father were there, obviously waiting for me. "We want to show you something," his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognise it." Opening the wallet, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had obviously been taped, folded, and refolded many times. I knew without looking that the papers were the ones on which I had listed all the good things each of Mark's classmates had said about him. "Thank you so much for doing that" Mark's mother said. "As you can see, Mark treasured it."

Mark's classmates started to gather around us. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, "I still have my list. It's in the top drawer of my desk at home." Phil's wife said, "Phil asked me to put his in our wedding album." "I have mine too," Marilyn said. "It's in my diary." Then Vicki, another classmate, reached into her handbag, took out her wallet, and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. "I carry this with me at all times," Vicki said without batting an eyelash. "I think we all saved our lists."

When I hear that story I think of Jesus' words in our reading today, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." And I am reminded

that our faith is based on love and is lived out through love. There are a myriad of ways that we can find every day to live that love, from the simplest little acts of assistance and generosity to finest gestures of compassion and kindness.

How can you share God's love today?

Amen

PRAYER

God most high,
Your love knows no limit,
There is no end to your compassion,
And no border to your kindness.
In love you give all for us in Jesus
Hanging on the cross,
Forgiving sins,
Risen from the tomb,
Holding out the offer of life everlasting.

No one is out of reach of your love
Nothing we have done puts us beyond your grace and your welcome.
We go through each day of our lives with but one certainty
We are loved.

Loving Lord,
Thank you for the surety of your love of us.
Help us in our turn to go on offering love in your name to others.
Make us ever-ready examples of your love in action.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

