

# Morning Service Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May – led by Anne Walton



Anne went seriously over time (and was mentally rapping her own knuckles!) but it was a jam-packed session. We started with a ‘plug’ for Christian Aid Week supported by a video clip about growing vegetables in townships in Kenya, then listened to an Anthem from the choir, before moving on to the complexity in today’s world of ordering a coffee.

Anne asked us if we ever felt overwhelmed when ordering coffee. It had been much simpler when she was younger, but now you could choose from cappuccinos, espressos, skinny lattes, caramel macchiatos, and countless other variations. They were all, in one way or another, still coffee. And that variety had made her think of the ancient Greeks, who’d had six words for what we simply called love.

- **Eros** – passionate or romantic love, associated with desire.
- **Philia** – the love of friendship, loyalty, and companionship.,
- **Ludus** – playful, affectionate love, often seen in young love or light-hearted affection.
- **Agape** – selfless, generous love extended to all people, including strangers.
- **Pragma** – mature, enduring love that grows through patience, compromise, and commitment.
- **Philautia** – self-love, which can be either unhealthy when it becomes self-obsession or healthy when it reflects a secure sense of self.

One of these words, *agape*, was especially striking. It described selfless love given freely to others, whether they were family, friends, or complete strangers. The term was later translated into Latin as *caritas*, which was where we’d got the word *charity*. *Pragma*, or mature love, spoke of the deep understanding that developed between people over time. It was the love that learned patience, compromise, and tolerance. *Philautia*, meanwhile, reminded us that self-love had two sides: it could become unhealthy self-obsession, but it could also be the healthy security that enabled us to love others well.

Anne suggested that perhaps we could borrow something from the Greeks, recognising the different forms love can take. And in doing so, we might become just as sophisticated in the art of loving as we were in ordering a cup of coffee.

In the **reading from John 14**, it had struck Anne that, while Jesus clearly intended his words to be a comfort, they were also a challenge. He was calling his followers into a deeper understanding of what it meant to belong to him. And as Jesus was not physically present with us, so the question became: how did we continue to follow him? The answer was simple to say but demanding to live: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Anne felt it might help to hear that verse not as a condition, but as a statement of reality: “Since you love me, you will be keeping my commandments”. Love for Christ was meant to find expression in the way we lived.

- The greatest commandment: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.
- The new commandment Jesus gave at the Last Supper: to love one another as he loved us.

And that last one was the one that caught us every time: “Love one another as I have loved you.” How were we to love as Christ loves? Were we really capable of it? The word used in the passage was *agape*: selfless, generous love given for the good of others. It was the kind of love Jesus showed when he knelt to wash his disciples’ feet, and the kind of love he’d shown most fully on the cross. This was the love Christ offered to us, and it was the love he commanded us to offer to one another and to all whom we met.

Jesus knew this calling was beyond our own strength. That is why he’d promised help: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever.” We needed that help—certainly Anne did. Jesus had told the disciples that this Spirit of truth would dwell within them. And if that was true for them, it was true for us as well.

Anne thought that these past weeks had been teaching us how to be disciples who grew in intimacy with the risen Christ. Surely that was one of the great themes of the Easter season: not simply believing that Christ was risen but learning how to live in close fellowship with him and revealing him to a world that did not yet see him.

As the theologian Caroline Lewis had observed, there was more to being a child of God than simply being raised from the dead. In John’s Gospel, resurrection was not the end of the story. The ascension and the promise of abundant life reminded us that God’s purpose was deeper and fuller: an ongoing life of communion with God. If Christ had died to reconcile the world to God, then we could not ignore the brokenness that still surrounded us. We could see suffering, conflict, poverty, and hatred in many places. Faced with such need, we were called to continue Christ’s mission: to plant the seeds of his kingdom and help them grow.

We did this empowered by the Holy Spirit, our Helper. In that strength, we were commissioned to be Christ’s representatives in today’s world, loving one another so deeply and selflessly that others might come to know Christ’s love through us. But that was not the end of the story. “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again”. And while we

waited for his return, we were called to keep growing in fellowship with him, to keep loving as he'd loved, and to keep building God's kingdom here on earth.