



May 17th

THE NEW SHOFAR

IF you love me, keep my commandments

What God wants is love, not sacrifice

Peter on how to live in a world of challenge

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. This sentence from 1 Peter is meant to be a starting point for living in the world as a faithful disciple of Christ. He has been talking earlier about the inevitability of suffering on account of the Gospel. While he was thinking about the reality of physical suffering and martyrdom, he was also including the day to day difficulties in living a life of Gospel faithfulness in a hostile environment. They would be misunderstood, marginalized because they were different and feared because of their strange and secret activities (though there was nothing secret about their meeting for worship).

The starting point is to have a *heart* in which Christ is honoured as Lord. What Peter means is that we need to be viewing our lives through the lens of Christ to whom God has handed over all power, authority and might. In being Christ centred, He will be the one dominating our senses and our feelings. No more will we fear what might happen to us, or is happening to us from outside of ourselves, for we know we belong to God in Christ. Christ reigns over us.

How does Christ reign in our hearts? Through prayer, through engaging with God in the Scriptures, in the celebration of the sacraments on a regular basis.

Peter then Continues: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.* There are a couple of key questions to answer here. **The first is:** Are we men and women of hope? Are we a parish enlivened by hope (and remember Peter is writing at a time when the future seemed hope-less for Christians)? Hope is not blind or a fantasy. It is a concrete foundation enabling us to have a future beyond the present. Hope is something growing out of Christ, a positive engagement with the world on the basis of the power and grace of God at work in us. **The second is:** Is our hope visible to outsiders? Can *they* look at the way we live in the world and see God at work and want some of that God? This is the only way to measure true hope – it will be life transforming.

Jesus is LORD

The title Lord is given to the Risen Christ. He is worshipped as the one possessing authority, power, and control. The Word of God describes Jesus as Lord of the church, the ruler over all creation, and the Lord of lords and King of kings. He reigns, not only over creation but over our inner most selves, our hearts, minds and our consciences.

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If you love me....do something to illustrate that love!

Right here at the beginning of our reading from John we have an indication of what is coming. It is nowhere near enough for us to claim Jesus is our Lord and our Saviour. Christ must be visible in the way we live our faith in the world and with others. Having a noticeboard with beautiful messages on it is a waste of resources if the people reading the signs are unable to experience those words in the words and activities of believers.

This is not going to be easy though because witnessing to Christ means obeying His commandments. We can sum up those commandments as *love one another as I have loved you*. In other words, illuminate our love for Jesus by *loving*. Act in love. And we know from other Gospels how this love is expressed by Jesus as loving God *with all your heart, soul, mind and strength*. And *love your neighbour as yourself*. It is the *heart, soul, mind and strength* creating the problems here. Love involves every part of who we are and must be included in what we do. Everything must be flavoured by Christ.

Love here is an active command. It means going out searching for those in need of love and transforming them through Gospel love. Jesus expects us to do much more than just love people who come our way. The command is to go out into the world – as Jesus went out into the world – and search for those who are in desperate need of heavenly love. Elsewhere these are included in the summary of the Lord himself. Love means *feeding the hungry, giving drink to those who are thirsty, inviting in the stranger and outsider, clothing those who are naked, looking after the sick and visiting those in prison*. There is nothing airy-fairy here! Love without acts of loving is not biblical love.

It is about making a difference to people's lives

One of the realities of God revealed to us in the Bible is the way He involves Himself directly in people's lives. He does not wait until He is invited. He is the *initiator* of love, the *initiator* of life changes. God's love is life transforming, bringing both people and the world in which they live into alignment with the divine vision and plan. Paul is a great example of this. He is running around doing what he thinks is the will of God – arresting the followers of Jesus. On the way to Damascus he encounters the Risen Christ and he becomes an apostle, a prophet, a missionary for the Kingdom.

Loving others as Christ loves them calls upon us to be versions of Paul. Come to know Christ to the point where we have a radical transformation of the way we live and love as men and women in the world. We have so many concerns about the world and Church of today and about their future that we want to make Christ known because we have ourselves experienced what a difference Christ makes to a person's life. Here Peter comes into alignment with John – it is up to us to do something with the Christ life with which we are filled through the gift of baptism.

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