



**Easter 5**

# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**Great love is diminishing the self for others' sake**

**Acts 10:25-48 - John 15:9-17**

***Jesus loves us in the very same way his Father loved him***

Because people are disciples, they are drawn into the love of Christ. Caught up in that divine love, they are then called to live in the reality of the same love. What an image! Our everyday life is carried out within a divine atmosphere, one that is every bit as real as the atmosphere we

*This love of which Jesus is speaking, is the love the Father has for Him. It overflows from Jesus into the disciples and from the disciples into the world.*

breathe, that supports our lives. This love energizes disciples. It sustains them, strengthens them and brings them to the fullness of their humanity. In this divine love we are able to be the very people we are created to be, that we yearn to be. That which we cannot be on our own we can become because of Christ Jesus the Risen and Glorified Messiah of God in whose love we live.

**abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love...**

This command to *abide* can be witnessed in what Jesus himself did. The people he encountered were able to experience the love the Father has for them in the love very Jesus showed to them. In their turn, the disciples reveal this love God has for the world when they *do* the words of Jesus, when they keep God's commandments. These commandments are directed at bringing the Father's love alive in creation. Why was Jesus doing this? Because his Father wanted all men and women to find peace and joy that is only possible in him.

## ***Commandments not laws***

When Jesus is speaking about obeying his commandments, he does not have in mind the 613 laws of Moses given by God at Mt Sinai. Commandments, as used here, are those things revealed by Jesus as being the Way to the Father. Rather than having six hundred plus of these, for Jesus there is only one fundamental commandment: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

*Christians abide in the love of Christ when they show themselves to be living as disciples of Jesus, when Christ's love can be experienced on their words and deeds.*

Love must be realized. It must be *love-in-practice*. God's love for the world was shown in his saving actions... "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (3:16). God's love for us is evident in the ongoing blessings that continue to flow our way as it sustains us, enables us to enjoy the gifts of the Holy Spirit and as God leads us and guides us to eternal life with him when we die. We know God loves us because of what he had done for us and continues to do.

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What Jesus says here is important: **Love is all about *lov-ing***. Declarations about love without loving actions are empty and as nothing. What the Gospel tells us with absolute clarity is how *Love-in-action* is the only valid proof of discipleship. It is *only in the act of loving* that we can experience the reality of discipleship, no more so than when we put ourselves aside that others may know they are loved and valued, that they are precious in the eyes of the Lord God and therefore precious to us. This is the measure by which we evaluate our own lives and the authenticity of our faith communities who claim the name Christian.

***Here is a gospel-based challenge***

*Of the major issues, discussions, plans and debates in our parish over the last year, which ones focussed in on the demands of **the love commandment** and which ones were more about our internal preferences, likes and wishes? Do they reflect the priority of mission to the world or are they more about looking inward? Do they enable us to engage more fully with the poor? Marginalized? Addicts? Refugees? The Lonely, etc? These are all about loving. Now we can ask those same questions about our personal priorities as disciples.*

It is love that defines Christians (and the Church) for those outside of the community, for unbelievers. To fail in love of others (especially love for fellow believers) is to fail in the Gospel.

This is a key way in which John makes a significant break away from the kinds of teachings found in the pagan teachings of Gnosticism who were creating difficulties for his own Church. Christianity is not about “knowledge” or esoteric truths. It is a relationship with God that needs to be lived.

This *love* is a specific and distinctive kind of love – a love *with which I have loved you*. It is the same *love* the Father has for the Son, a *love* he in turns shares with his disciples. It is a *communal love*. Like the *love* of the Trinity, it is an outward flowing *love*.

***God has no favourites...***

I like to translate the Greek of this verse to read the way it does in the heading here because it brings it down to a very human level – what Luke is trying to do in Acts. When God looks at people, this divine scrutiny is not focussing in on anything other than how this person is someone for whom his Son was born, lived, suffered, died, rose and ascended. It is not about working out whether or not they are “Jews” or “Gentiles”, have been baptized or remain ignorant of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This was an enormous shock for Peter. He had been living on the presumption that as a faithful follower of the laws of Moses and now a disciple of Jesus the Christ, he was favoured by God. It was by doing all of the things demanded by the laws and customs of Judaism he was certain of the divine love.

Then along comes Cornelius. He was a good man, someone pursuing the truth and open to the reality of there being a God who loved him and was calling him to take the place in human history ordained for him. God had work for this good pagan. God also had work for Peter, the good Jew turned good Christian-Jew. God also loved the pagan Ethiopian eunuch, the man declared by the Law to be living beyond the love of God. We can also add the story of the Samaritans and the way they responded positively to the call of the Gospel when it was proclaimed to them. Even the thief dying on the cross next to Jesus at Golgotha was promised *today you will be with me in paradise!* The very person/people we are inclined to judge, to push to the margins or look down on in some way are all immensely loved by God.

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