

Love one another as I have loved you.
Love one another, because without love, you do not know God.

God, who is love, wants nothing more than for us to love each other.

God, who is love, wants us to understand that unless we share in the divine love, we don't really know God at all.

Our love for one another is an index of the strength of our love for God.

The fourteenth century mystic Meister Eckhart wrote:

God lies in wait for us with nothing so much as love. Now love is like a fishhook. A fisher cannot catch a fish unless the fish first picks up the hook. If the fish swallows the hook, no matter how it may squirm and turn, the fisher is certain of the fish. Love is the same way. Whoever is captured by love takes up this hook in such a fashion that foot and hand, mouth and eyes, heart and all that is in that person must always belong to God. Therefore, look only for this fishhook, and you will be happily caught. The more you are caught, the more you will be liberated.

Once you are in love, it is not so difficult to do what the relationship commands.

A great American storyteller wrote about two young people who were very much in love. Christmas Eve was coming and they wanted to give presents to each other. But they were very poor and had no money for presents. So, each one, without telling the other, decided to sell his or her most precious possession. The girl's most precious possession was her long golden hair and she went to a hairdresser and had it cut off. She sold it to buy a lovely watch chain for her lover's watch. He, meanwhile, had gone to a jeweller and sold his watch to buy two beautiful combs for his beloved's hair. They exchanged their gifts. There were tears at first, then laughter. There was no hair for the combs and no watch for the chain. But there was something more precious and that was their self-sacrificing love for each other.

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For many of us, 'Love one another' was one of the first lessons we learnt as a Christian. Most of us can't remember when or how we learnt this – it was just something we absorbed, along with the alphabet and our times tables. And yet, even as children, we knew that this lesson could mean trouble – big, big trouble if we ever took it seriously. After all, who in their right mind could actually love the girl who told the teacher that you threw the book out of the window while her back was turned? Who, besides maybe his grandmother, could love the boy who kicked a football through a window, and then blamed it on your best friend?

It could be a bit risky to become part of a group that loves anyone, no matter what. And so we danced, just a little, around that particular commandment, hoping that the people we genuinely loved would somehow distract God from the ones we disliked, or avoided. But it didn't seem to get any easier when we got older, did it?

G. K. Chesterton wrote, 'The Bible tells us to love our neighbours, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people!'

Even as the message of 'Love one another' is proclaimed in church, we find ourselves wondering. Does God really know the people I work with? Did God hear the way that woman spoke to me? Surely God doesn't intend for me to love that man... he's strange...

And just like the disciples before us, we are astounded to discover that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on these very people.

Love one another.

The one without love does not know God.

It's not that we're not willing to love others, it's just that it's a whole lot easier when 'others' remain abstract, theoretical, and very, very distant. After all, it's fairly safe to extend your hand across a chasm when the people on the other side are too far away to reach.

And yet, time and time again, Jesus shows us that the people we are supposed to love are those standing right in front of us: the woman cringing in fear; the man beaten and left for dead; the cheating tax collector; the ungrateful son; the proud ruler; the lonely widow...

Mother Teresa said that,

Love has a hem to its garment
That touches the very dust;
It can reach the stains of the streets and lanes,
And because it can, it must.

If the message God sends us doesn't seem to change, then maybe what needs to change is our definition of love. Perhaps the love God invites us to share isn't a warm, fuzzy feeling or a sudden rush of emotion. Maybe gospel love is an act of will, a decision to see people in a whole new light.

Maybe, it means that we look at the people standing right in front of us, and expect the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon them.

Maybe, it means that we look at them and say, 'You know, you remind me a bit of your Father... your heavenly Father.'