

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, 2/9/2012 Holy Trinity

We are told that love is in the air as we speak of the spring season.

This morning's readings seem to me to have a common theme of love flowing through them.

I hope that we all know that love received is love to be shared.

We are told that life is short, so be swift to love and make haste to be kind.

When we went to Brisbane recently as we came down the escalator to the main part of the terminal we were greeted with a rush and a hug from our 16 year old granddaughter.

It gladdened our hearts as I am sure it did hers to see us and be able to give us one almighty hug.

It was truly a case of love received is love to be shared.

The first reading today shows the surge of emotion that comes with the giving and receiving of intimate love experienced by the lover and the beloved.

"The voice of my beloved! Look: he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills! ... Like a gazelle or a young stag ... Arise my love, my fair one, and come away ... the time of singing has come."

Love received is love to be shared.

The writer of the Letter of James also builds on this theme.

We are to be doers of the word and not merely "hearers who deceive themselves".

If we accept God's unconditional love then we are to share that love unconditionally with others and this includes the poor, the outcasts of society, the marginalised, the refugees who come to our shores, those who are different from us whether by employment, race, language, appearance or religion.

"We love because God first loved us".

Every act of kindness, of patience, of forgiveness is motivated by love of the other in response to God's love for us.

So we need to be "doers of the word and not merely hearers."

And why are we not “doers of the word” at every opportunity?

I suggest that the love for others is taken over by fear: fear of rejection, fear of being played for a fool, fear of their continually coming back for more.

It is only having a more intimate loving relationship with God that will cast out the fear.

And so we come to this morning’s Gospel passage in which Jesus challenges the purity laws that are so fiercely protected by the Pharisees and scribes who have come down from Jerusalem.

At the time of Jesus, the religious people were arguing about the cleanliness of their hands and of the food they bought in the marketplace and they were criticising the disciples of Jesus for not doing the same.

This was not about hygiene but about obedience to what was considered divine commandments.

Jesus declares all food as clean with the explanation that it was not what went into the mouth that was the trouble but it was the intention behind what came out of the mouth that was important.

It was really a case of not so much ‘what you eat’ but ‘what is eating you’ that determines what kind of person you are.

This was an issue at the time of Jesus, of Mark and James and it is still an issue today.

It is not a matter of whether we get the rituals right at this table or altar in this place or at the table at home or in the restaurant of which cutlery to use or which wine goes with this meat but who has compassion in their heart for those over the road who are different from themselves.

So I sum up with a song that I sang in my guitar playing days and which is still appropriate to-day: “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord. They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love, they will know we are Christians by our love.”