

SERMON: 6 MAY 2018 – Rev Alistair Cowper

“THEY’LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE”

(1 John 5:1-6 and John 15:9-17)

John writes in his letter, that whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God. In other words, God has become the father of all who believe in Jesus, and he loves **them** with exactly the same love he has for Jesus.

And the believer is to respond to that love, by obeying God’s commandments. In other words, believers are to love God back, by living in a way that pleases God, and having such faith to believe that, in Christ, the believer can overcome anything the world throws at them. They can trust God, in Christ, to give them victory.

I have seen this faith at work many times, in fact I see it on a daily basis. I see people face great difficulty or trauma, yet somehow they manage to get through it and emerge, battered and bruised, on the other side. Maybe you are going through some battle at the moment, perhaps an illness or a loved one’s illness, or some other trial. And if that’s you, you need to know that Christ can give you, indeed longs to give you, victory.

Now that might not mean that things turn out exactly as we thought they should, but it’ll be victory nonetheless. Think of the parents whose child was born and quickly became sick. The family doctor was away and so a relief doctor, who turned out to be an imposter, came and prescribed hot mustard poultices to be applied to the baby’s eyes. The baby recovered but was made blind by the treatment. That baby grew to be Fanny Crosby, the great hymn writer, who until her death at age 95 was writing as many as 6 or 7 hymns or poems a day.

One well-meaning preacher said to her one day, "I think it is a great pity that the Master did not give you sight when he showered so many other gifts upon you". Fanny Crosby responded at once, as she had heard such comments before. "Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I was born blind?" said the poet, who had been able to see only for her first six weeks of life. "Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Saviour."

The Bible tells us that God specialises in giving his children more than they ever dare hope or imagine. In his letter to the Romans, Paul encourages the

early followers of Jesus with the words, may the God of all hope fill you with grace and peace. God is able to make you strong, just as the Good News says.

These words still speak to us today, because God's word is alive and active and not restricted to the time in which these words were first written down.

God is still able to make you strong in faith so that you and I are able to obey his commands and remain in his love, in the same way that Jesus did, and you will have the same joy and the same love, the same hope, the same faith.

What then are we to do with this faith, hope and love that he is giving us? Jesus puts it very simply, love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one that this, that he lay down his life for his friends. I have chosen you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: love each other (John15:13,16-17).

So we are to use the love he's shown us, and is giving us, to love each other.

It's earlier in John's Gospel, in chapter 13:34-5, that Jesus first gives the new commandment to love one another, and tells his disciples the result of loving one another will be that all people will know that you are my disciples, hence the song we just sang, "yes they'll know we are Christians by our love".

The greatest way we can advertise the work of the church here in Kirknewton and East Calder, and at the same time be the best ambassadors for Christ, is by committing to loving one another. It's that witness, of Christ's love among us, that will draw all people to put their faith in God and discover the love of Christ for themselves.

So we've answered the question of why we should love each other – because Jesus commanded us to and because it's the greatest testimony of the love of Christ at work among us that we can give to the world around us.

But how do we answer the how question? How do we love each other? Well perhaps the first thing to say is that it's not easy, it doesn't always come naturally, sometimes we need to work at it, even go through the motions of loving each other until we get to the point where we actually do. We certainly can't do it in our own strength. We need to be filled with the love of Christ, and we need his Spirit to feed us daily.

A simple prayer to start each day might be helpful. Something like, Father God, thank you for showing me, in Christ Jesus, how much you love everyone. Please fill my heart afresh with Christ's love today, that I might love you and everyone I meet. Or even more simply, Lord, fill my heart with love today, amen.

But the Bible is also full of practical advice which can help us to love each other. We need Spirit and we need Word. For example,

- Be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19)
- Consider others as more important than yourself (Philippians 2:3)
- Honour one another (Romans 12:10)
- Be slow to anger and quick to forgive one another's faults (James 1:19, Numbers 14:18, Colossians 3:13)
- Practise hospitality (Romans 12:13)
- When one of you stumbles, the other can help pick them up (Ecclesiastes 4:10)
- Share your possessions with one another (Acts 4:32, 2:44)
- Spend time together, share bread together (Acts 2:46)

These are ways that our faith can be put into action in the name of love, helping those in need, visiting, shopping, making meals, sending cards, all things that you are already doing and acts of kindness that really do matter in the economy of God. And they will have their reward. God will use these for good. So let's keep on asking for the Spirit of God, our Guide, to show us how we can love each other day by day. And let's expect to see the church grow as a result. In the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.