

Change....

Change is hard. It feels safe to settle in with what we have come to understand and not look deeper. Because that is scary. It feels very unsteady when the goal posts move. When we are required to come at something from a different angle, a different perspective, a different point of view. It feels like our brains might explode!!

Our reactions can be quite strong, often due to fear and our feeling of losing control.

Can you imagine Peter, the impulsive, knee jerk reactionary disciple receiving this vision that is recorded in detail in the previous chapter.

Peter was brought up a good Jewish boy. He would have learnt the Torah by heart. And known Leviticus and the many laws recorded there. Laws about skin diseases, childbirth, mildew; as well as the food ones.

At that time, in Leviticus, God wanted His people to be Holy, separate and different and unique from the pagan nations around them, who sacrificed pigs.

In limiting their foods, God was also protecting them from disease. Keeping them safe, physically and spiritually.

Poor Peter, So much had changed since Jesus' death and now it looked and sounded like God was calling him to sin. To break the law. After centuries of keeping apart from the gentiles, God, through Jesus, was calling everyone to be in His Kingdom. All are equal in God's eyes. Everyone is included.

Isaiah 43 v18 and 19. 'Forget the former things; See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.'

This change was seismic. Many, Jews and Gentiles, had received the Holy Spirit. God's presence within, indwelling, guiding, teaching and helping us. The barriers were removed.

The image that comes to my mind is the curtain of the Temple, torn from top to bottom on Good Friday as Jesus died, for us all.

God is telling Peter to basically, get a grip!!

All that God created is good. Nothing is unclean, because He made it.

The fact that he had this vision 3 times is significant.

The repetition of 3 times in the Bible often signifies emphasis, completeness, and certainty.

It is important, a certain truth; and the number 3 represents divine qualities like wholeness and perfection.

Peter was obedient, even though it went against everything he had learnt. His mind was opened and his eyes came to see the most enormous and extravagant love ever... he allowed his mind to hear the Holy Spirit guiding him, to accept that God loves us all.

And really, it wasn't a surprise. Jesus said in the Gospels, he had heard him say it, 'Love one another'. Each week we recall what Jesus commanded us to do..

Matthew 22 v 37-40

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. All the Law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.'

The Gospel says it all...Love one another

This is *agape* love. Frequently used in the new testament.

Not *philia* love which is a word that conveys warmth and affection, and the most commonly used in Greek.

AGAPE love is not about feelings, but more to do with the mind and the will.

In John's 2nd letter, he writes about walking. Make a deliberate decision to **walk** in the light, to walk in the pathway of love. It is a journey, with twists and turns, but heading in the right direction.

How reassuring to see that throughout history we all face similar challenges.!
To love those who irritate us, disagree with us and maybe we just don't like them!.
But, we have no choice in the matter!
It is a commandment. Not an aspiration.
And obeying this commandment, the christian community demonstrates the character of God. That character is love (1 John 4:8)
A Church without love is missing the whole point.
Acting in, and out, of love, reflects His glory, His truth and His forgiveness.

Let's remind ourselves, this is not the soppy, feelings, love, but action. It is active.

I am a sinner and so are you!
But, God's incredible compassion and love forgives us and still loves..
WE are called to do the same. It's a great relief to me that I am not the judge.
(Although, in my head I confess I do judge)
Scripture repeatedly tells us that God is. Jesus didn't judge. He spent time with the outcasts, the prostitutes, the tax collectors and enemies of the Hebrew people.
He healed them, he listened to them and he loved them.

Someone in this church community, who I love dearly, respect and seek counsel from, says, you can only love people into the kingdom.
This person demonstrates this everyday, in many ways. Patiently listening, accepting and helping practically.
I want to be this person, when I grow up!

I try to remember that no sin is greater than another. We all mess up and we all need forgiveness.
God is in charge. Not me, or you.
And there is that control thing again.... I need to rest in Him. He who made all things for his pleasure and delight.

Being a parent is a major reality check. It is my biggest joy. And a major challenge.
My daughter and I may have differing views and she is not reluctant in being forthcoming; but I love that she can say what she feels. It stretches me. Makes me look at things differently and enlarges my view of the world and what is going on. We may not always agree but that is ok, because I love her unconditionally, and she thinks I am broadly acceptable!

In summary,
God loves us so much he wants us to love like him, to live like Jesus and to bring healing and restoration, starting with our relationships.
Every single one of us has people in our lives that challenge and stretch us.
Ever wondered why?

It's to keep us open, to polish us up like fine metal or precious stones so we can reflect the shining life changing love of God.

Let's respect each other's points of view; let's carry on listening even when we do not agree and let's really action that love of one another.

Such love comes naturally when we know we are beloved of God (1 John 4:19)

Our Church's vision strap line is
Sharing God's love
To live by faith to be known by love and to be a voice of hope

Father,
You accept us, love us and forgive us.
Help us, by the power of your Spirit, to do the same.
To reflect your astonishing, abundant love.

Amen