

A Message from Mary Beth

We have been living through difficult, uncertain times for many months but I think most of us would agree that things are looking up! The government has signalled that the planned unlocking from Covid restrictions is expected to continue with much more freedom next month. But even this news creates uncertainty -- what will be the new 'normal' and how will we adapt from our ingrained, pandemic mentality?

In our gospel passage today, there is reassurance and sympathy for uncertain times like this.

Jesus is finally giving his disciples 'commandments', or rules to guide their present and future lives. This must have been very welcomed by them, as they had been listening to Jesus' teaching for many months. As devout Jews, they were used to a religion which was rule bound. You just need to think of the Ten Commandments which Moses gave to his people from God as evidence of this.

Underlying the Ten Commandments is the imperative that God's people should demonstrate through their lives what their God is like. And this is an imperative which Jesus fulfilled completely. Throughout His life he kept the commandment to love God, and to show God's love. This is the commandment which Jesus is giving to his disciples -- to love one another as he has loved all of them, as his friends. Now this description of their relationship as 'friends' is a departure from Jesus' previous teaching, when he often referred to himself and his followers as 'servants'.

"I have called you friends", he said, "because I have made known to you everything that I heard from my Father." This is a relationship based in love; love which is divine and mutual. And what is special about this relationship is that it's not simply a set of instructions we are told to follow through blind obedience. As friends, we are invited to God's table, to eat and discuss and share in God's plan for the world. In our love for one another, we are called to extend this invitation to others.

This is a comforting message for our times because Jesus is assuring us of his friendship and divine love. Friendship speaks of shared experiences and loving support, something many of us are praying for these days. It brings to mind a picture of Jesus walking alongside each one of us, bringing us comfort and reassurance that we can handle the changes ahead.

When He tells us to love one another as He loves us, the picture expands to encompass a whole group of friends, loving and supporting one another. And suddenly the future seems less uncertain, in the midst of others, who are all sharing and helping one another in the most amazing love of God.

A prayer for this week: *Dear Jesus, send Your divine love into our hearts and make us friends with You and one another, bound together by faith. Amen.*

God bless you all,

Mary-Beth

