

Worship from Home: Sunday Worship for 9th May

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

TALK

Rev Tim Hughes

In the days before COVID 19, before lockdown, I took a group of 10 year old boys for my son's birthday paintballing. And in the car, on the way over, they were full of bravado, confident of what they were going to do, how they were going to attack the enemy base, win great victories and battles. And we arrived at the paintballing centre and we queued up alongside lots of others. And as these young lads were looking around, they could see these fully grown, hairy scary men queuing up for paintballing. You know, some of these guys were dressed from head to toe in camouflage, they had their own paintballing guns and mask. And I could see these young lads getting a little bit anxious and fearful. We went in and we were given our outfits and our masks and all of these boys were coming up to me. I could see the whites in their eyes, "Is my mask on secure, am I okay?" And then the marshals got up and they began to explain the rules, what would happen, what was allowed, what wasn't allowed, how we were all going to be kept safe and how we could ensure that we had a great time doing paintball together.

And it was interesting as the marshals shared the rules, the regulations, what was to come, the boys began to relax. "Oh, okay, we're going to be alright and we're going to have fun." So many people can often complain that Christianity is all about rules, is all about don'ts, is about restrictions, is about limiting people. And this couldn't be further from the truth.

When Jesus Christ walked on the earth, he said in John's Gospel, John 10, verse 10, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." The way of Jesus leads to human flourishing. It brings a peace and a contentment that the world could never, ever bring. And the practises, the commands, the ways of Jesus Christ are for our benefit, they're to lead us into the fullness of life. John writes in this letter in verse three, "This is love for God to keep his commands and his commands are not burdensome, his commands are not burdensome."

Put most simply the commands of Jesus Christ are to love the Lord, your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus calls us as his people, firstly, to worship him, to put him first in everything. In our finances, to put him first, not to be a people that just pursue wealth and building up greater income in our bank accounts.

No, to be generous to radically give. In our careers, to put him first, not to trample over people to get to the top, not just to be so set on ambition and careers, on status but to be kind and generous and full of integrity in the workplace. In our marriages, in our relationships, to put God first, to be a people that pursue faithfulness, love, care, that we're quick to journey with one another.

To be quick to say, sorry, and to move forward together. And then of course, this command, to love our neighbours as ourselves, to be radical in the way we look on the world around us. If we see need not to turn a blind eye but to move towards, to care for those in need. And when we choose this path of loving Jesus, putting him first and loving our neighbours as ourselves and making those sacrificial choices, as we begin to die to self, as Jesus, again talks about, we find actually we come alive. We find in that place, though it is costly, though it is painful, though it requires perseverance, but it's a journey full of joy and adventure. And it's important to note that the inspiration for following Jesus, for outworking his commands should always be our love for him.

The author, Gary Chapman in his book, "The Five Languages of Love," he talks about these love languages. Words of affirmation, speaking kindly about people, acts of service, taking the bins out, doing the washing up, physical touch, a hug, a kiss, gifts, thoughtful presents. Quality time, giving your undivided attention to someone.

These are ways that we all express and perhaps want to receive love. But, you know, Jesus, he talks about His love language. John's Gospel, he says, "if you love me, you will keep my commands." Or as John writes, "This is love for God, to keep his commands." When we love Jesus, when we receive his love, when we understand who he is, what he has done for us, when we understand something of his kindness and his goodness, that his desire is to bring the best out of us.

When we capture that then we will want to respond by being obedient. By saying, "God, ultimately I trust that your ways are the best ways, that your commands around how I live my life, my choices, my outlooks are not to restrict me, not to, you know, take away my fun and enjoyment, rather, it's for my blessing and benefit and for the health and the benefit and the blessing of the entire world." If you love me, you will obey my commands. So as we reflect on the scripture, what are those things that maybe you're battling with, areas where you need to, once again, come before God and surrender and say, "I want to follow you. I want to trust you, I want to believe that you have my best intentions." That actually those things that the world might say, aren't going to lead to life and flourishing. But actually when we choose the narrow path of following Jesus, out of a sense of love for who he is and what he's done in our lives, we will find great blessing, great fruit and great life in that place.

So why don't we take a moment to pray that God would come speak to us, challenge us, move in us and lead us to be a people that love him so much that we will follow his commands. And those commands will lead to his blessing and his kingdom coming here on earth, let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, when you walked on the earth, you lived a radical life that confronted the ways of the world. And you call us to follow you, to put you first, not to follow the culture around us, not to follow the ways of the world but to trust that your ways are best. We want to be a people that live lives that are full of obedience and trust that you know best. Draw us closer to you and use us, we pray.