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Dear Friends

*"This is my Commandment that you love on another as I have loved you"
John 15 v 9 to 17*

We are indeed rejoicing in many things as Wales moves from level 4 to level 3 restrictions or, as I prefer to say, level 4 to level 3 liberations! This week I was thrilled to return to my local swimming pool. As I stood with others anticipating the doors opening, we shared our joy to be returning after five months. But, within five minutes, the conversations changed, and many began to complain about the closures of some facilities and the reduced timetables. Do you, like me, sometimes wonder if Covid has taught us anything? It's hard not to get sucked into the negativity and remember the many blessings we enjoy in the UK.

We all rejoice and give thanks that churches are open again for worship. Our halls will re-open soon and we look forward to some sort of physical re-engagement in our communities. But we know, while we rejoice, many across the World continue to lament, to suffer and to die.

This week is Christian Aid week and this year the focus is on climate change. This is very apt as our climate has certainly changed in more ways than one over this last year. I wonder how many of you remember the task of delivering envelopes through people's doors and collecting them? I always recall that people (including myself and William) were a bit reluctant to knock on doors! It's not a surprise to hear that this year Christian Aid week is going digital and is appealing for people to donate electronically - which is much easier than counting up all those pennies! Less paper waste and no more door knocking! There will also be events online, one of which will be a live streamed service on 10th May at 1pm from our very own Dr Rowan Williams, chair of Christian Aid.

Archbishop John Davies (recently retired) reminds us that whilst we face our own difficulties at home, it is all too easy to overlook those who are in much greater need. At the start of the pandemic the Government reduced its giving to International Aid by 60% with Water Aid being reduced by 80%. Is it right to reduce our giving when times get tough for us? Just imagine how much tougher it is for those who already have so little?

Our neighbours, brothers and sisters across the world rely on the generosity and love of others to sustain them and often this is merely to maintain an existence. Jesus came to bring life. It is at its fullest when a life is lived in His Love and that is where we begin our reflection today.

We continue reading from chapter 15 of John's gospel. After hearing last week that Jesus is the True Vine, this week's discourse speaks of abiding or, more simply, living in love. There is a commandment that Jesus leaves us, we all know well - to love one and other as he has loved us. We will all have our own ideas and experiences of love in our lives and how we respond to this.

Love is a tricky business, and I am not speaking about some romantic notions of love, there's far too much of that in our society, which can lead to it becoming diluted, not respected. There are even some who use the word love to manipulate and control. Love is a powerful force indeed!

The love that Jesus speaks of is agape love, or we may say unconditional. It is the divine love. Divine love, which is not centred on itself, but a love which is creative and liberating. It is a love which enters into the world of another. It is a love that gives of itself, and is shared so that all are raised up. It is about a world which is giving and receiving, and this command to love is a desire for another to know love. It is a command that brings hope, and hope

brings joy. As Jesus says, he tells us about these things so that his joy is in us, our joy is in him and we are complete.

During my three years at college, we would fundraise and gave annually to Christian Aid. This would usually be a cake stall, after all everyone loves cake! But, at the moment, we cannot bake or eat cake together. Some, from college, even went to Uganda on a missional trip. I intended going, but it was not to be on this occasion and I was very disappointed! Those who attended took various donations from the college, towels, blankets and money; the people of Uganda were in need of these things. When my friends returned, they shared pictures. I remember seeing my red towel around the waist of one of the ladies there. Apparently, she was so pleased that she had her own towel. A towel that cost me only £3. The best £3 I have ever spent! This giving and receiving of a towel was for me a moment of shared joy! That is the difference that an item or small donation can make to the life of others. I don't know about you, but when I share joy with another, that to me is a manifestation of this divine love. A love that Jesus calls us to share, the love that we are to live in and to abide in.

Love in Christ

Belinda



The women of Mabale Uganda