

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**'Cave Service' at Modderpoort**  
**9 August 2009**

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Romans 13:8-14  
John 14:6-15

May I speak in the name of the one God, who loves us more than we can ever ask or imagine.

Dear Bishop Paddy and people of God of the Diocese of the Free State; dear Bishop Nicholas and friends from Blackburn; dear brothers and sisters in Christ; thank you once again for the invitation to share with you in this very special service.

Preparing to come here, I was struck by how apt it is that the feast of St Augustine of Hippo falls in August, our Month of Compassion.

For it was St Augustine who wrote that all of faith, all of the Christian life, could be summed up in this way: 'Love, and do what you will.'

Provided we are governed by love, he says, then whatever we want to do, whatever our hearts urge us to do, is the right way to act.

It seems quite a radical interpretation of St Paul's words that love is the fulfilling of the law!

Does it *really* mean that we can do whatever we like, provided we are motivated by love?

The challenge to us is to understand what love is, and what it means to show love.

Perhaps it is easier to say what love is not!

We cannot use 'love' as an excuse for speaking and acting selfishly.

I'm afraid that all too often, when someone starts by saying 'I'm going to speak the truth to you in love', we know that what is coming next is likely to be hurtful.

Even when there is some truth in the matter, a truth that needs to be said, using such a phrase does not mean we can just speak our minds willy nilly.

We must engage our hearts, before we open our mouths!

Nor can we use the excuse of love to get our own way.

How often do we hear 'If you really loved me, you'd ...' – anything from a child demanding a new toy from its mother, to a man trying to persuade a girlfriend to sleep with him.

To demand something from someone else in this way, is hardly a very loving way to act.

But perhaps you want to challenge me by saying that Jesus is not very different when, as we heard in our Gospel reading, he says to his disciples 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments.'

Is Jesus also trying to blackmail us into good behaviour, on the basis of love?

We need to look at what Jesus means by love.

It is certainly more than a warm and fuzzy feeling, more than beautiful sunsets while Whitney Houston [*or whoever you prefer!*] sings in the background!!

Nor did God so love the world, that he sat on a cloud, wringing his hands and despairing at the mess human beings were making of their lives!

God so loved the world that he acted!

God so loved the world that he sent his Son – he sent his Son not to condemn the world, but to save the world. (Jn 3:17)

And Jesus willingly emptied himself of the glories of heaven, and became human. (Phil 2:7)

God in Christ came to us.

He did not come just to stand there, and tell us to sort ourselves out, and then take himself back to the comforts of heaven..

He came as one of us, to walk alongside us, to stick with us, to share fully in human experience and in human weakness, including the struggles of temptation. (Heb 4:15-16)

This is what compassion is truly about – for compassion means 'to feel with' or 'to suffer with' someone.

When we talk about Jesus' passion, it is not enthusiasm or desire we mean, but the old, original meaning of the word – suffering.

For Jesus, in his loving compassion for humanity, shared in the suffering of mortality and death, as he gave up his life for us on the cross.

As Jesus says later in his words at the Last Supper (from which our gospel came), 'No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.' (Jn 15:12)

Yes – God in Jesus Christ shows us what love is all about.

It is acting. It is coming alongside. It is walking with. It is persevering. And it is self-sacrificing.

Love that does not take action is mere sentimentality.

Love that does not come alongside is aloof and condescending.

Love that does not walk with is only being patronising.

Love that does not persevere is just a passing romantic daydream.

Love that is not prepared to give of itself is no more than an empty pretence – or, as St Paul might say, a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. (1 Cor 13:1)

So perhaps we should add a bit of interpretation to St Augustine's words: 'Love as Jesus loved, and if you are doing that, anything goes!'

In the same way, perhaps what Jesus is telling us is not an order, but more like a description: 'If you love me, as I have loved you, then you will be keeping my commandments.'

As St Paul reminded us in our reading, all the commandments about how we treat others can be summed up simply: love your neighbour as yourself.

Once again, love is central – and the way we express love for Jesus is to love others.

The challenge I want to put before you today is to consider 'Who is my neighbour, our neighbour; and how shall I, how shall we, show them God's love and compassion?'

Well, our neighbours are not just the people who live next door to us, that's for sure!

To answer the question of who is my neighbour, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, the despised foreigner who helped a Jewish man who had been mugged and beaten up.

They were two people who would not normally have had anything to do with one another.

But their paths crossed – and one was in need, and the other showed compassion.

Are we alert to those who cross our paths, and are in need?

At the end of St Matthew's Gospel Jesus speaks of how God will divide the sheep from the goats, on the basis of whether or not we have fed the hungry, given a drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger, tended the sick and visited the imprisoned – for whenever we do this, we are not only loving our neighbour, we are, says Jesus, loving him.

We love others because we love him; and as we grow in loving others, we will find ourselves growing in love for him.

But loving is not always easy.

The Good Samaritan must have been very, very tempted to hurry by on the other side, as did the priest and Levite in Jesus' story. He must have been frightened by the sight of this man – for how could he tell if the violent robbers were still nearby?

It took courage for him to stop.

It took more courage for Jesus to persevere in his love for humanity – praying so earnestly in the Garden of Gethsemane that his heavenly Father would find another way, instead of the cross. But Jesus had the bravery, the commitment, to see it through.

Love is not something altogether soft and mushy.

Though love is tender, inside it has a very strong backbone!

Real love is tough love!

When I switch on the TV news or look at the newspapers, I realise that we need courageous compassion.

How do we show courageous compassion when faced with disruptive behaviour, bullying, knifings, and worse, in schools?

Or violent crime in our neighbourhoods? Or the killing of policemen and –women who dedicate their lives to society’s well-being?

Though Jesus went to the cross for us, he did not advocate martyrdom.

But he was not afraid to be clear and uncompromising in proclaiming and living the message of the kingdom of God – a message of radical transformation of the ills and brokenness of his society, including among its leaders.

Do we dare to show the same commitment, the same perseverance, ready to stand there and be counted, so that the rest of our community can draw courage from us, and stand and be counted too?

And dare raise our voices, so that others can join in raising their voices in unison in peaceful but persistent protest – at lack of safety, at lack of service delivery, at lack of adequate health care ...

Here in Modderpoort we especially remember the prophetess Mantsopa, who was not afraid to speak out, and tell the truth as she best saw it, even when it was unwelcome. As we know, she was exiled by her king.

Yet taking refuge here, she found a spring of fresh, refreshing water.

We too should not be afraid to speak the truth to power, knowing that we too have an unfailing spring: the living water who is Jesus Christ, who will keep filling us and flowing through us and sustaining us.

You might remember that I gave my installation charge the title ‘Sekgo sa metse’ – the call for us all to be vessels of Christ’s living water is central to the life of our Province.

Mantsopa was one of the mothers of our nation – whom we particularly honour in August, women’s month as well as being the month of compassion.

And today we give special acknowledgement to the life and work of the Anglican Women’s Fellowship.

Thank you, dear sisters, for all that you do – and take courage, as you show God’s compassion to the world around!

The motto of the AWF is of course 'United in Prayer, Service and Love' – showing love not only where it is easy, but where it is needed.

Unity and love should go hand in hand.

Jesus tells us that when we love one another as he has loved us, then the world will know that we are his disciples (Jn 13:34-35).

Here is another challenge for courageous compassion, when within the Anglican world there are so many pressures trying to divide us.

But today we rejoice, because our partners from Blackburn are present – and what we know is that, no matter what our differences, we are united, because of the love we share with Jesus.

For if I am 'in Christ' and you are 'in Christ', and if, as St Paul tells the Romans (Rom 8:39) nothing can separate either of us from God's love for us in Jesus Christ - then nothing can separate us from each other.

Therefore we can dare to love one another, and together share God's love with the world – confident that we are united in Christ, united in our inheritance of the faith, united in our calling to common mission – and all so that the world may know the coming of the kingdom of God.

So we thank you, Bishop Nicholas, and friends, for sharing with us today.

Thank you for your partnership with the Diocese of the Free State

So let me sum up.

Jesus said – If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

St Paul wrote – Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

And he also wrote – Love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbour, love is the fulfilling of the law.

St Augustine wrote – Love, and do what you will. Or, as we reinterpreted it - Love as Jesus loved, and if you are doing that, anything goes!

So let us be like St Augustine, and spread God's radical love in God's world.

Amen.