

**“If you love me keep my commandments.”**

I’ve always been really surprised by this very simple ethic of the Jesus way. Surprised by how simple it sounds and yet how hard it is to do. We are told in another place that there are only two commandments that really count. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and body, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. If we do these, we are told, we will be ok.

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So, if we love Jesus, basically we are to love God and our neighbours as ourselves. Like I said, very easy to say. Very easy to explain. But, not so easy to do. I think loving God is at least easier to justify to ourselves that we do. We go to church, put money in the offering, even pray a little. Might even read the bible. All good things, very good things to do, don’t get me wrong, we would all be in serious trouble if that stopped happening. But the first part is linked to the second part, the loving of our neighbours’ bit. Which seems to me an extraordinarily hard thing to do. If you are like me, you find this excruciating. I mean I don’t even like a lot of people, let alone love them.

The bloke who cut me off this morning. The woman who turned in front of me without indicating. The people who hold me up when I am in a hurry. All the morons in the world. Vladimir Putin. Donald Trump.

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I suppose I can take comfort in the fact that the church has always had trouble with these words. Right from the beginning, in the Epistles, we are told that Paul wants to emasculate the people who are leading the Galatian believers astray. Our gospel today, John, has been a source of anti Semitism over the centuries, with its portrayal of “the Jews”. It’s said Martin Luther the great 15<sup>th</sup> century reformer had his fair share of influence on the views of one young Mr Adolf Hitler, back in the day.

And we don’t have to go far back into history to see how this works. In our own lifetimes we have seen unfair laws and proclamations on groups of peoples justified with a scriptural basis. In South Africa during Apartheid. In the south of America, even now. Even here in NZ, you only need tune in to some of the more prominent Pentecostal preachers to get a modern take on these things. So, from the scriptures onwards, the church has struggled with these words, this idea.

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While all of us might want to say, we don’t support these things, or we wouldn’t have. It never hurts us to look at how we really fare, if we think about what it is that Jesus is saying to us.

Many of you will have heard the story about the frog in the kettle. The story about the frog who jumped in to the kettle because the water was warm and he was cold. He loved it in there, toasty and snug. The trouble was the temperature of the kettle kept very slowly rising, and the snug frog didn’t notice ... on and on the temperature crept higher ... and the warmer and snuggier and cosier the frog became, until it was finally too late. He was done for. Cooked in his own juice, without even realising it was happening.

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Some of you will also know that Ruth has been away visiting her sister in Texas. Now Ruth’s sister is a great pianist and has been playing piano and organ in the Deerbrook Baptist Church in Humble Texas for many years. And while Ruth was there, she attended a choir practise with Naomi, and afterwards

they and the choir got together, and had a cup of tea. While they were sitting around chatting about things, one of the woman stood up and said that her hand bag was heavy this morning. It seemed a very strange thing to say, and someone asked her why that was the case, and the woman who owned the handbag replied that she had an old one in her purse. As you can imagine Ruth thought that was also a very odd to thing to say, until someone else asked her about that as well. So out of her bag she pulled a very large handgun. This was her old one. Not the nice new lighter model, that she normally carried.

This was a woman who sung in the church choir, loved the Lord Jesus, prayed and gave to the work of the Lord, yet she pulled this enormous handgun from her purse.

As it turned out, all 9 women at the choir practise, were carrying guns. Every single one of them packing ... including the Pastors wife. A massive array of lethal force.

Frogs in a kettle?

**“If you love me keep my commandments.”**

**“Love the Lord your God with all your might and your neighbour as yourself.”**

We all look at this and think, what’s going on?

But the church has struggled with loving my neighbour for its entire existence, and I know that I’m not in a strong position to argue with the Lord Jesus on my performance here.

Now, I’m not packing, but if I lived in Texas ... would I be?

And while I’m don’t ... I do wonder ... how hot ... is my kettle getting!

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**“If you love me keep my commandments.”**

Amen.