

Eaglehawk Uniting Church
Sermon for 19th May 2013
Readings: Acts 2:1-21; John 14:8-17, 25-27
Rev Ralph Clarke

Parting words! Most of us have said them. When the kids are going somewhere it might be Don't forget to write, or, to change your socks. If someone is dying it might have been something we want them to remember like – I love you. When we leave someone who is going to face a hard time we might say something reassuring like, “You'll be all right”, or hang in there or God will be with you.

Jesus wanted us to remember two things”

1. If you love me you will keep my commands.
2. I will send the Holy Spirit to you to be your helper, advocate and counsellor.

There's a connection between the call to keep Jesus command to love, and the gift of God's Spirit to help us. Love is not easy, and we need some help with that. The Holy Spirit is God's helper. Keeping Jesus commands will not come naturally to us. Some people who follow Jesus might never make mistakes, but for the rest of us, who don't always know the most loving thing to do, and are not always motivated to do the most loving thing, we also need this command to love.

Jesus primary concern is that love will not be easy and we will need the Spirit of God to help us. Many of us can probably think of times when it was difficult to decide what is the loving thing to do. Let me tell you about one of my memories and you can think of your own.

A few yrs ago I went into a shop in a Geelong suburb and as I came out there was a little girl about 3 yrs old, just up the street, crying her heart out. She was about to cross a busy road so I went across and asked what was wrong and she said, "My mummy's gone". I asked if her mummy had been gone long (because you never know these days) and she said "no". So a conversation took place. "Where do you live"? "Over there". "Maybe your mummy's just gone next door and she'll be home soon. If you go back inside the house I'm sure she will be home soon". "I don't want to go back", she said. I said "if your mum comes home and you're not there your mum will be worried about you". I thought that made good sense but she wouldn't hear a word of it.

Now I had a dilemma. Should I just leave her there in the street crying and risk her running across the street and being hit by a car. It also didn't look good for people to see a man talking to a little 3 year old in the street who was crying and saying “I want my mummy”. Just then mum came along from a nearby house and I suddenly realised I had another problem. It is one thing what the public might think of me being with this little girl, but what was the mother going to think. It wasn't a comfortable moment. I could hardly just walk away. That would look bad. I don't know what this mum thought of me but when I explained myself she seemed to take it ok.

That uncomfortable experience is one in which I felt in need of some help, guidance certainly – but also help to hang in there when I was uncomfortable and would prefer to have walked away from that little girl, and help to think about what was best for the child and not only for myself.

The scriptures sometimes refer to the Spirit of God with images of inanimate things like wind and fire but in today's reading Jesus uses a word for the Spirit of God that has been variously translated as a helper who walks beside us, or a courtroom advocate who speaks for us, or a counsellor who sits with us and helps us through a difficult time, or like a supervisor of apprentices as they learn they trade. God's Spirit stands beside us and helps us find our way. The Spirit is the Spirit of truth who keeps reminding us of the love of Jesus and convincing us to try living by that love even when we are tempted to do something else.

It has rarely been easy to decide how to love as Jesus taught us. Mostly it's a choice between things that look partly good and bad, or a choice between ourselves and others. We need God's Spirit to guide us but the Spirit never takes away our responsibilities to learn and to grow in our understanding of what love means. At times we will wrestle with the priorities we choose, and the challenges we face. Always the word we hear is

the same. "If you love me, you will keep my commands". And always, the Spirit of God will help us, not to avoid the difficult bits, but to face up to the deepest struggles of what love means for the people of Christ.