

The Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton
and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

Sermon 9th May 2021, 6th Sunday of Easter

Reading: John 15:9-17

We arrive in today's Gospel as Jesus is giving his last sermon to the disciples, preparing them for life without him, something they have yet to fully grasp despite the many times he told them. Jesus must have felt great sadness at the thought of leaving his friends, but he knew he was fulfilling his Father's will. His words show feeling and emotion – "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love!" What does it mean to abide? It's an old-fashioned word, not much used today. It's more than togetherness or closeness, it goes deep within, right to the very heart of someone else.

I was lucky enough to have a wonderful mother who I loved with all my heart. On my wedding day, before she left the house, she recognised that moment would be the last time we would be together in the only relationship we had known; she hugged me, told me she loved me and gave me a new handkerchief to have in my bag, "just in case I needed it". My mother is no longer alive, but all these years later, I still have **the** handkerchief. When I hold it and smell it, I am transported back to my wedding day and the mother I loved; it is a tangible connection to her and a reminder of the love we shared and the roots I came from, **and that thought sustains me.**

The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways. As I was contemplating the Gospel and pondering on how Jesus would be feeling at this point in his ministry, the Holy Spirit that led me back to those moments with my mother, moments of reassurance, shared love and a parting of the ways, a similar position that Jesus and the disciples found themselves in. In her own way, my mother was preparing me for the change in our relationship that would come through my marriage to Roger, while Jesus, on a more monumental scale, was preparing the disciples for life without his physical presence, before the new relationship that would come through the resurrection. Jesus reminded them that he loved them with an abiding love, a love that would not end and a love that would sustain them in life to come. Jesus was offering them something to hold on to.

We all have times in our lives when we need something to hold on to, times when illness strikes, circumstances change, or we lose a loved one, a friend or a much-loved mum.

Although I have kept the handkerchief, I do not cling to it in any emotional way, I know full well it is not the thing that carries my mother's presence.

It is the deep love we shared that it is as strong today as it always was, that keeps us connected.

And that my friends, and much more, is the love God and Jesus have for each other and Jesus and had for his disciples. But more importantly, it is the love God has for us.

When we accept that gift of love, his presence inhabits us with a love that goes deep and never ends it is an abiding love that sustains and nurtures throughout our lives and beyond. Jesus Has shown his commitment to us by dying on the cross, it is our duty to respond with commitment of our own and become rooted in God, who changes how we see ourselves, one another and the world around us. Amen

Reverend Irene