

It's a New Day, It's a new year.

The recycle bin is full of the dregs of Christmas wrapping, and the dregs of celebration. The New Year has come and gone. The long, sun drenched day have been spent, "unplugging, Unloading, refreshing our bodies for the year ahead. The days on the calendar have been all too quickly crossed. A time to relax has been used up in just preparing ourselves to relax. By the time the celebrations are over, and the house back in order, the time we set aside to be refreshed in mind and body are gone. The day will soon be here, if it has not already arrived. They day where that alarm that you so joyously switched off weeks ago, now has to be turned on again. They day when all hope of finally getting around to starting those New Year's resolutions is gone.

I'm as guilty as anyone. Every year comes and goes. "This is the year" I'll say. For me it's been "This is the year ill really seek God, to push in to him, to listen for his voice, to trust his spirit". This is the year I'll try to pray more, as matt inspired us last week

This is the year I'll try to love more.

That one is the hardest. We look in the word and see a god of love. A good who loves, and commands love. And because of that I've been challenged to love more; because that's what God really asks of us

This is the truth about Love

**Mark 18 vs 28 says**

***<sup>28</sup> One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"***

***<sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, "The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, <sup>30</sup> and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.<sup>[a]</sup><sup>31</sup> The second is this, You will love your neighbour as yourself.<sup>[b]</sup> No other commandment is greater than these."***

He asked for the most important comandment, and Jesus gave him 2. They both go hand in hand, obviously loving God is the most important, but it comes bound to the other, they are not separate.

So we are commanded to Love. And that's my goal this year, To love God, To love my neighbour,

Is this what it looks like?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YGfrGKK9Mo>

It may start like that, but we all know that that magic moment on the bow of the ship isn't eternal. We end up in the freezing water, and have to choose to continue to love, or to float away to our untimely hypothermic death.

Well its not always that dramatic, but the point is, we have to choose

I remember the first time Melissa and I had a “mild disagreement”, we had been dating a little while and we hit a bit of a bump. We had already decided that we loved each other and wanted to get married, but this made us not be “in Love”. In that moment we had to choose to work on it, to get over it and to love despite.

A year later I was the best man at my brother wedding and that was the advice I gave to him in my speech, I’m not sure why I felt that I had the authority to give this sort of advice to my brother who is 5 years older than me, but this was what I had learned about love “one day” I said, You’re going to wake up and it’s not going to be a good day, you’re not going to feel like loving her, but your going to have to make the choice to love her despite of what you might feel”

And we all go “yea that’s real love”. We know that the feelings are not constant, and that our marriage partner, or the person we are dating, or our mum and dad or siblings, well, were not always going to feel like we love them, but we get over it because we do love them.

And it’s similar with God. Definitely harder though. We love him, but a lot of the time the “feelings aren’t there” We see that a lot after Easter Camp and similar “Encounters with Jesus”, one of the 10 pillars of discipleship that we have here at OBC. We have this big encounter with God, and the feelings of joy and Love are there, we feel so close to him, and that its all roses. We get back down from this high, to real life, and the feelings fade. And we have to choose. To choose to believe that the God who we know loves us, and those feelings that we had toward him, are still true even though it doesn’t “feel the same”.

Or we can choose to go with what we are feeling, and believe that God no longer Loves us, because of sin, because he’s not real, because any number of reasons. I know that many of us have probably been through that, maybe that’s a bit what you feel like today. If no-one has ever told you this before, let me just say, that those feelings, of being unlovable by god, are a Lie.

***Romans 8:31-39 New Living Translation (NLT)***

***<sup>31</sup> What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? <sup>32</sup> Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup> Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. <sup>34</sup> Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.***

***<sup>35</sup> Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? <sup>36</sup> (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep."<sup>[a]</sup>) <sup>37</sup> No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.***

***<sup>38</sup> And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,<sup>[b]</sup> neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not***

***even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. <sup>39</sup> No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

That's the truth about love, and if you need to hear it this morning, that's for you.

Those feelings one of the main reasons why Matt and his youth leaders take on a huge role ever year after easter Camp. To grow and disciple our youth to Choose to love god God daily despite what they might "Feel".

It's tough, We feel we don't feel, and we have to make the choice.

And then the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment comes which makes it even tougher. Love your neighbour as yourself. At least with God we sometimes have feelings of love, at least sometimes. But that's not what it's like with our neighbour is it? We don't have those feelings to begin with. And we certainly don't feel obliged to love them like we do our immediate family. I've found I don't correlate the Choosing to love them, as "it's not the same" type of love. But scripture tells us, "love your neighbour as yourself. That unwavering desire that we have for self-preservation, for fulfilment, for satisfaction, we should transfer that in to how we love our neighbour. More than just taking their rubbish bin in from the road, or mowing their lawn, but caring for their wellbeing, desiring that they are healthy, happy etc, and that you transfer you need for self-preservation, that God provides us eternal life, to really caring about their eternal future.

I find that really hard....I've got to love my neighbour. But then love gets even more extreme

#### ***Matthew 5:43***

***43You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' 44But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45that you may be sons and daughters of your Father in heaven.***

So we get to our enemy. In our day and age the enemy is a really harsh tem. Filled with hatred and anger and disgust. Who is your enemy? Is it Muslim Extremists, the person who burgled you last week, the serial rapist we hear about on the news, Donald trump? Hillary Clinton? John Key? We have feelings toward our enemies, but it's not love.

But it wasn't always like that. WE have all heard the war stories of soldiers who were enemies, playing cards with each other on Christmas day over the trenches, and then going back to shooting each other the next day. There is a level of mutual respect, we are fulfilling our duties, following orders, but we are still human. But we expect that amongst leadership of that time, that hatred still existed. You wouldn't imagine Hitler and Churchill taking a plane during a ceasefire to play a round of golf together. There is still an unknowing sense of enemy and the feelings surrounding that.

I want to show this clip that I feel is one of the closest representations of loving your enemy that I have ever seen, the Meeting of the Christian King of Jerusalem, king Baldwin the Fourth (a leper), and Saladin, the prince of the Saracens. At the time, Christians held Jerusalem, and it was open for the pilgrimage of all faiths. But Saladin was marching to war against one of the Kings generals who had broken the terms of the agreement between The Muslims and the Christians. Here is there exchange.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zO9zBvOzHA>

Here is what I saw in both parties in how they loved their enemy. They treated them with respect. They greeted each other with honour, they spoke to each other with honour, they sought to preserve peace amidst their conflict, and Saladin cared for his enemy so much that he sent for medical aid for him.

Now that is a demonstration of love. Though in opposition of mind/belief/purpose and goal, they sought to demonstrate love to one another, to defer bloodshed, and to care for the other person's interests despite their conflict. But even if we are not received by our enemy with love, we are still commanded to love him

***Proverbs 25 vs 21***

***If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;  
And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;***

***22 For you will heap burning coals on his head,  
And the LORD will reward you***

No conditions on how the enemy responds, only that we are to love our enemy, and "heap burning coals on his head". Not as an act of Hatred, but the explanation is that the symbolism of burning coals, was like that in the temple. The priest would put incense on coals on the day of atonement (the day where God was petitioned for the forgiveness of the sins of his people), So our enemy may feel shame from our doing a good deed toward him, but the shame (the coals) would burn the incense of his spirit (being an enemy/ hatred all those evil feelings) and bring repentance. We overcome our enemies' evil, with good, and actually seek to restore him, not just with us, but with God.

So we are called to Love God, to love our Neighbour, and to Love our enemy

In a moment I will finish the service with a prayer that I hope will inspire you in the year ahead, in how we approach each day but before that

We are going to take a moment in silence.

Maybe you want to take a minute to choose to love God again, despite what you may feel today.

Maybe you can picture your neighbour, and how you can choose to love them.

And maybe you can picture your enemy, and how you can help restore them to you, and to God, through acts of Love. So let's take a moment before we finish.

IT'S QUIET. It's early. My coffee is hot. The sky is still black. The world is still asleep. The day is coming.

In a few moments the day will arrive. It will roar down the track with the rising of the sun. The stillness of the dawn will be exchanged for the noise of the day. The calm of solitude will be replaced by the pounding pace of the human race. The refuge of the early morning will be invaded by decisions to be made and deadlines to be met.

For the next twelve hours I will be exposed to the day's demands. It is now that I must make a choice. Because of Calvary, I'm free to choose. And so I choose.

I choose love . . .

No occasion justifies hatred; no injustice warrants bitterness. I choose love. Today I will love God and what God loves.

I choose joy . . .

I will invite my God to be the God of circumstance. I will refuse the temptation to be cynical . . . the tool of the lazy thinker. I will refuse to see people as anything less than human beings, created by God. I will refuse to see any problem as anything less than an opportunity to see God.

I choose peace . . .

I will live forgiven. I will forgive so that I may live.

I choose patience . . .

I will overlook the inconveniences of the world. Instead of cursing the one who takes my place, I'll invite him to do so. Rather than complain that the wait is too long, I will thank God for a moment to pray. Instead of clinching my fist at new assignments, I will face them with joy and courage.

I choose kindness . . .

I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. Kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And kind to the unkind, for such is how God has treated me.

I choose goodness . . .

I will go without a dollar before I take a dishonest one. I will be overlooked before I will boast. I will confess before I will accuse. I choose goodness.

I choose faithfulness . . .

Today I will keep my promises. My debtors will not regret their trust. My associates will not question my word. My wife will not question my love. And my children will never fear that their father will not come home.

I choose gentleness . . .

Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.

I choose self-control . . .

I am a spiritual being. After this body is dead, my spirit will soar. I refuse to let what will rot, rule the eternal. I choose self-control. I will be drunk only by joy. I will be impassioned only by my faith. I will be influenced only by God. I will be taught only by Christ. I choose self-control.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. To these I commit my day. If I succeed, I will give thanks. If I fail, I will seek his grace. And then, when this day is done, I will place my head on my pillow and rest.