

SERMON 9 MAY 2010

by Richard Pennington

Unconditional Love

Most of us would have heard of a group of people who live mainly in the United States. They are a group who predominately live in Pennsylvania and follow the teachings of Jakob Ammann who lived in the seventeenth century in Switzerland. They are known as the Amish. The Amish follow simple customs and shun modern technology and conveniences. They refuse to take oaths, vote or perform military service.

The Amish believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that he died for their sins and that he is the way to salvation. There are however many Amish who also practice a works based relationship with God, They view their good works as earning favour with God. If their good works outweigh the bad works they feel God will allow them into heaven.

The Amish are basically good, hard working people who believe that if they stay on the right path then they will get their final rewards in Heaven when life is over. The Amish say that being Amish is a lifestyle not a religion.

They choose to keep the simple life so that they can focus more time on family and home rather than the things that require advanced modern technology.

There are times when I feel that I could embrace the Amish beliefs wholeheartedly. I sometimes feel that today's society or at least the technology is running so fast that it's difficult to keep up. I think about the mobile phone that I had in 1999 – eleven years ago and the phone that I have now – computers and ipods and now work pads and so on. Communication has kept pace with this technology. You can watch the news on your phone on the way home on the train. I remember as a 17 and 18 year old lad living at home with my family that I had to make a time to use the only home phone to ring my then girlfriend and take up half an hour or an hour on the phone chatting ideally away. If I didn't ring her or she me then we would have no contact. Now we can communicate with mobile phones, email, skype, face book, texting, blogs, tweating, twittering, and if all else fails I guess face to face. Sometimes I find some of this technology daunting even unnecessary. Yesterday I had a conversation with my son Chris in text rather than ear to ear, this certainly wasn't unnecessary but it was how the young choose to communicate.

I am coming to terms with the fact that the generation of today communicate completely differently than we did 30 years ago or are used to and I am also of the opinion now that if we don't embrace this new technology then we will just be left behind. Of course it may not

matter if we get left behind but if we want to communicate with our younger generation then we have to go some way towards meeting them if we are to expect them to come some way to meet us.

It may appear that I am a bit cynical don't like this modern way of doing things society and there are certainly times when I think that I would love to go back to a simpler slower way of life however when all said and done I am a huge fan of this technological age. It was amazing I took out travel insurance yesterday and they asked if I wanted the policy certificate emailed or mailed. I chose emailed and I had the certificate before I had hung up the phone.

One of the things that comes hand in hand with this technological age is that information and knowledge is far more available – almost anything you want to know is available through the click of an internet key - if we want to see the news we can have it in glorious realistic colour as its happening from anywhere in the world and if we are not home we can simply record it on digital and watch it on our ipod at some more convenient time. If we want to watch a film we can simply download the film from the internet – information is much more accessible, much more immediate, much more simple to access.

Well this is all very well but what relevance does this have for us this morning. The reading from John deals with one of the key sticking points, hiccups, in my opinion anyway, for people as they struggle with religious concepts and one of the easiest ways for people to turn their back on God. The problem is the concept of putting our faith in something we can't see – can't touch – can't download.

We can't simply download Gods' love or the Holy Spirit and we can't just access the Peace of God through our computers – it requires work, love, and faith on our part. Jesus is going but he is giving us his peace –

“I am going away but I am coming to you” Peace I leave with you my peace I give to you I do not give to you as the world gives. Jesus is not giving us something that is unsettled transient chaotic materialistic, something that will be superseded as soon as we start to understand it but he is giving us the peace that comes from the Holy Spirit, peace that is comforting, that gives us calm, hope, joy, at all times but especially in times of trouble peace that can only come from God.

That most wonderful feeling, the knowledge that we are not alone and God is with us. The sticking point of course is that you can't see it, you can't have instant proof, you can't receive a text message telling you what to do, its not there on CNN to watch you won't see it on

channel 9 however in this high tech high gigabit world it is right there to read in the Bible – in John 14 vs 23 “Those who love me will keep my word and my father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them.” What a fabulous promise, but one so many miss.

Today is also a very important day of the year – Mothers Day – a day that celebrates mothers, those incredible individuals who shape lives, who nurture, who love without condition. We all know someone who is a mother, some of you are mothers, we have so much to thank mothers for – I go back to the Amish – where the home is the centre of all – families coming and going but always coming back to the home – surely how much easier it must be for them – these days our children more independent, more worldly, harder to pin down, more in communication. I think that there is probably no greater challenge than to be a parent, to bring up children, to instil moral and ethical values, to understand what to say and what to do, to cope with the differing outlooks and pressures of the differing generations.

To keep pace and be everything you need to be – a friend, a mentor, an example, a confidant but not too close, cool but not embarrassing, to know when to be there and when to back off, and all with no real proof that you have got it right or that you are getting it right. So today mothers we salute you - really we salute you 365 days a year – but today is the day that we say thanks, despite everything we as children do and say and how we act we do appreciate you and of course love you unconditionally.