Vocation or Vacation?

As a family, we love Bangkok. We have been there many times.

I love the diversity of people, the hustle and bustle of the streets. The constant beeping of horns, the smell of satay sizzling on the barbecue, the colourful stalls overflowing with tropical fruits. Freshly squeezed juices, jackfruit, coconuts being cracked open right in front of you.

I love wandering through the streets and neighbourhoods. The noise, the colours, the smells, the chaos. There's always something happening.

And I can confirm that in some streets of Bangkok, there is an awful lot of loving going on!

[pause]

Anyhow, I came here to talk about **vocation**, not my most recent **vacation**.

Although they do say that when your work is your vocation, it's almost like being on a permanent holiday.

Find a job you love, and you'll never work a day in your life.

That's the common saying.

Well… I'm not entirely sure of that.

[pause]

What does it actually mean to love?

[long pause]

We use the word love for almost everything.

I love Bangkok. I love Thai food. I love my wife. I love my children. I love riding my motorcycle.

Surely, we don't mean the same thing in each of those.

And I dare say that we live in a world where we have become very good …at loving things,…[pause] but not always so good at loving people.

We have come to associate love so strongly with what makes us happy and what gives us pleasure.

[pause]

What Is Love?

In today's Gospel, .. like last week….we find Jesus being confronted yet again.

This time, he is asked which commandment in the Law is the greatest.

Now, this is an interesting question. But the answer is even more interesting.

He commands us to love.

Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

And love your neighbour as yourself.

One thing is for sure: it's a verse you hear pop up now and again.

But what I find particularly interesting is that Jesus tells us the whole Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

How can that be, if love is merely an emotion? a meaningless feeling that comes and go whatever our mood….or state of mind is?

You may recognise the following slogans:

I'm lovin' it.

[pause]

That's McDonald's.

And you may remember:

Love. It's what makes a Subaru a Subaru.

Some real feel-good, funky loving going on… Makes you want to pick up a burger on your way home in your brand-new Subaru….

For at least a brief moment, you feel good… until you see your empty savings account And the stack of unpaid bills.

But surely, when Jesus commands us to love, he is talking about something much deeper than feeling good?

[pause]

Love God with all your heart, soul, and strength. Jesus takes this straight from Deuteronomy chapter 6, a fundamental part of the *Shema*, one of the central prayers of Jewish faith.

Here, love is much more than a feeling. It demands loyalty, faithfulness, worship, obedience and devotion to God.

It involves our whole being, and it has to **shape the way we live.**

[pause]

Love ought to be a fundamental part of our being, not a mere occasional feel-good feeling.

And I think it's lovely …how Jesus takes these two commandments from the Old Testament and brings them together.

The second commandment,… love your neighbour as yourself, comes from Leviticus chapter 19.

And if you read that chapter, you'll find that it's remarkably practical. It talks about caring for the poor, being honest, treating people fairly, not holding grudges, and how we behave towards one another.

In other words, loving our neighbour is not simply about liking someone

or …feeling affection towards them.[pause}

I've been known to joke that **I love some people, but that doesn't necessarily mean I like them! X2**

[pause]

And thank goodness love doesn't depend on liking someone. Because I'm sure we all know someone we find rather difficult to like.

[pause]

It's about respect, dignity, justice, hospitality, and how we treat the people around us.

And just a quick footnote here: [pause]..we can expect to be treated with dignity and respect ourselves. Love does not mean accepting abuse or mistreatment. Sometimes loving also means setting boundaries, walking away, and shaking the dust off our sandals! [pause]

Throughout Leviticus 19, God repeatedly reminds his people: "I am the LORD."

Our love for our neighbour is therefore not separate from our love for God. It flows out of our relationship with the Divine.

And perhaps that is why Jesus brings these two commandments together.

Loving God with our whole being has to shape the way we live.

Nowhere is that love more visible than in how we treat one another.

Love and Vocation

And now we can begin to understand what Jesus means when he says:

V40**"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."**

Love is not simply another religious obligation. It is what gives everything else its meaning and direction.

When I first started exploring my own calling, I attended silent retreats.

I remember sitting in silence for hours, hoping that God might speak to me. Preferably in a clear, audible voice, telling me exactly where to go and what to do.

Unfortunately, that did not happen!

And don't get me wrong. Prayer and silence have become an important part of my spiritual life.

But over time, I began to wonder whether I was making this whole business of vocation more complicated than it needed to be.

I was too busy asking God what he wanted me to do .. I overlooked the simple… the down to earth.. the here and now..

Love God with your whole being. And love your neighbour as yourself.

St Augustine famously said:

"Love God, and do as you will."

[pause]

Now, that sounds a little dangerous, doesn't it?

Surely Augustine wasn't suggesting that we should simply do whatever we fancy!

But when we genuinely love God, that love becomes the guiding principle of our lives. Our desires and our will begin to align with what God desires. [pause—slow—breath]…

We begin to want what is good, not simply what makes us feel good.

And that love begins to shape our thoughts, our decisions, and ultimately the way we live.

It makes us wanting… to learn more about God and get to know him better. Through Scripture, through prayer, through coming to church. Some of us might even feel called to undertake theological studies.

This may give us some freedom when discerning vocation.

We can bring our love for God into the here and now by inviting Christ into our everyday lives.

Our passions, our desires, our gifts and our abilities.

You see, vocation is not so much about what we do, but about who we are becoming.

Now, don't get me wrong. There is a lot of doing involved!

We begin by loving God, remaining attentive to the Holy Spirit, and allowing that love to flow into our actions.

[pause]

How does our love for God shape the way we treat others?

[pause — 5 seconds]

Love in Action

Now, there's a whole other sermon in this, but I want to touch briefly on something important.

Loving the people around us — our neighbours, strangers, friends and family — and showing hospitality is foundational to Christian mission and discipleship.

The love we have for God shapes our hearts and minds, and that love becomes visible through what we do.

our attention, our patience, our forgiveness, and sometimes our willingness to put another person's needs before our own.

This is where vocation becomes something much greater than a particular job or ministry.

It becomes a way of living.

when that way of living becomes central to us as a Christian community, something wonderful can happen.

We become a community of peacemakers, bridge-builders and life-givers, ….a community where people encounter Christ. …. a community that others want to become part of.

We don't need to be ordained, employed by a church, or even know what our future holds before we can begin responding to God's calling in that way.

Back to Bangkok

Which brings me back to Bangkok.

I love Thailand. The food, the people, the culture, the busy streets. I love being there.

But the thing is, I don't have to be in Bangkok, or travel to the ends of the earth, to proclaim Christ.

Don't get me wrong. Some people are called to do precisely that, and that's wonderful.

But perhaps what the Church needs from us right now is to begin closer to home.

Loving the people around us. In our churches, where we live, where we work, and wherever we gather.

And so, during this Vocations Month, perhaps we might ask ourselves a slightly different question.

Not simply, **"What is God calling me to do?"**

But **"How am I loving God, and how is that love becoming visible to the people around us?"**

….Therefore:

Love God with our whole being. Love the people around us as ourselves. And let that love shape the way we live.

Amen.