

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May**

**Easter 6**

**Acts 10: 44 – 48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5: 1 – 6; John 15: 9 – 17**

English is a strange language isn't it? That's probably because it's a hodge-podge of many different languages which is why sometimes we have so many different words for one object – what do you call this for example?



I grew up calling it a roll but if you travel around the UK you would hear lots of different names for it: bap, barm cake or barm, cob, and bun are the most widely used but it could be muffin, tea-cake, scuffler to name just a few.

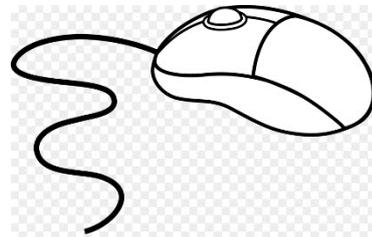
The peculiarities of English don't stop there, sometimes one word will have a number of different meanings – 'bear' is an animal but we also use it as a verb – 'to bear a burden' or as an emotion – 'I can't bear him!' and of course we can use the same sound with a different spelling and an entirely different meaning – 'bare'.

Then there are words which look the same but sound different and have different meanings – is 'minute' a unit of time or a word to describe something very small?

Just when you think you've got our language tamed, along comes the next generation to change it all  
this mouse



becomes this mouse



Often meaning depends on context. One of the words that we use to describe many different emotions is 'love' – that first named fruit of the Spirit. If I say that I 'love' raspberries, I mean that I really like the taste and enjoy eating them. If I say 'I love her to bits', I probably mean that I have a deep affection for her – and that expression usually comes with a 'but' followed by whatever she has done to annoy me.

The Greek language however has four words that are translated as our English word 'love': *eros*, *storge*, *philia*, *agape*. Only two of those words actually appear in the Bible but all of the concepts are there somewhere.

*eros*, is not a word found in our Bibles but the idea of erotic/romantic love is certainly in the Song of Solomon and is implied in some of the other love stories found in the Old Testament.

*storge*, another word not found in our Bibles, denoting the bond of kinship, familial love, affection. This is the love between family members or someone who has been an important part of your life, a mentor, a nanny, even a pet. There are several examples of God expressing parental love towards us: Isaiah 49 v 15; Psalm 27 v 10; Matthew 23 v 37 are examples.

*philia*, this is the one we know as 'brotherly' love which always had me confused given what I've just said about *storge*, it took me a while to work out that this brotherly love was more 'brothers-in-arms' than sibling brothers, friendships formed by a common bond. In his book *The Four Loves* C S Lewis suggests that a shared interest will foster friendship, although he also warns that this can have a negative effect if people band together, forming a clique that excludes others. Paul uses the word *philia* when he urges the Romans to love one another (Romans 12 v 9 + 10)

*agape*, is the sacrificial, undeserved and constant love that God has for us and that we are encouraged to have for God and for others. This is the word used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 and is also the word used by John both in the gospel reading and in his letter. Jesus commands us to love each other in this way

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you;

Jn 15 v 9a

and

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'

Jn 15 v 12

That sort of *agape* is only possible if we remain attached to the true vine as we heard last week.

Jesus continues to challenge and change things as he now says

You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer... Jn 15 v 14 + 15a

We talk about being children of God, of being part of God's family, we also talk about being servants of God, of serving him in love, this is *storge*, familial love, the affection of a long-standing relationship. In calling us friends Jesus is changing that to *philia*, the love that binds us together – no matter what our differences are, we have a common bond in him and with him. We need to be careful though that we don't fall into the trap that C S Lewis warns about of becoming an exclusive club. That's why Jesus wants us to grow the fruit of *agape*, to love each other as he has loved us because *agape*, isn't exclusive, it expands to draw in others.

Peter exhibits *agape* when first he responds to Cornelius, a gentile, by travelling to Caesarea, then, when the gathering believes what he is saying and God pours out the Holy Spirit on them Peter calls for water so that they can be baptised. It's not the 'right' way of doing things, you're supposed to believe, have a course of instruction, be baptised in water and only then would you receive the Holy Spirit, furthermore, these people were not even Jews! Peter has already been shown by God the error of his previous thinking so he simply follows where God leads showing that God's *agape* is for everyone.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if love could be spread as easily as a virus? If when we go out into the street we could breathe love at the people we meet and infect them so that they could breathe love at others. Sadly, it doesn't work that way. There is a little of *agape* in *eros*, *storge* and *philia*, we need to allow the Holy Spirit to grow that seed into fruit so that in our words, our actions and our relationships we show God's love.