

Hello everyone.

‘Which commandment is the first of all, Jesus was asked.

He answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

³¹ The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

And we try our best to keep them, these commandments, don’t we? It struck me one day this week that in lockdown keeping the second part of the greatest commandment,

You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

has maybe taken on a new dimension.

Yesterday, Norma and I received three parcels and they weren’t all from Amazon. These parcels, a box of wine, a delivery of plants and a box of disposable masks were all gifts. OK in the spirit of complete disclosure, one box, the box of plants

was a gift from Norma to us-a new tree to replace our lovingly tendered pear tree that set fruit for the first time this year after almost seven years to reveal that it was infact a plum tree not the pear tree we had believed it to be. And yes I know I studied botany at university- I must have been off the day we covered Pear trees. Had it been mislabelled by our supplier or more likely had we lost the label in the move to Banchory from Echt?

Three parcels in one day. What a day of excitement at the manse.

I don’t think I’m alone in making more of an effort to remember people’s birthdays and special anniversaries.

Giving gifts. Hoping to make people just that bit happier

Living out the greatest commandment, the greatest gift,

in lock down has a refreshingly exciting feel to it.

Remember even Jesus was pointing back to a special time from the past when he quoted directly from the book of Leviticus. A list of don'ts and do's squeezed in between two parts of the holiness code.

Maybe we should think of them as reminders.

Remember love your neighbour as yourself.

And that will include remembering birthdays and sending gifts and encouraging cards and e-mails even during lockdown.

I'm sure like me you've shared online family birthday parties, Zoom conversations and sent presents.

As the lockdown restrictions have been reduced a bit, it has made very small family birthday gatherings possible. That is so long as it's not raining because we have to meet outside.

Ministry has always been about meeting people face to face, but during lockdown the phone has been one of my best friends so now it is quite a

relief to hold socially distanced planning meetings in the garden with Sarah.

And separately with the volunteer gardeners sprucing up the church garden in front of the manse. Thank you everyone who is making it happen all with the help of someone called Harry Lawnmower who actually turned out not to be one of our members, but our church lawnmower. Oops.

But thanking others is a large part of what we are all doing, isn't it? The thank you to key workers was a great example as were the rainbows in the windows.

All without meeting each other.

And it is continuing.

We will be holding the church picnic virtually over this coming weekend and we have expanded how we worship to include our friends at Durris-Drumoak,

We also managed to hold a virtual Christian aid week

and a virtual VE day celebration.

And this Friday, the legion have invited pipers across Scotland to join a poignant tribute to thousands of Scots who were killed or captured during “the forgotten Dunkirk” 80 years ago. Three leading Scottish Armed Forces charities have asked pipers to take a leading role in paying tribute to the lesser-known battle of Saint-Valéry-en-Caux

On the 12th June 1940, just days after the successful mass-evacuations at Dunkirk, thousands of British troops remained on continental Europe under French command. These were mainly men from the 51st Highland Division, they fought almost continuously for ten days against overwhelming odds until eventually surrounded at St Valéry.

However, a combination of fog and the proximity of German artillery above the town prevented the waiting flotilla of ships from reaching shore. Those who were not killed in the fierce fighting, or fell to their deaths from the cliffs trying to escape, were captured and marched hundreds of miles to

Prisoner of War camps in Eastern Europe, where they endured appalling conditions for five long years.

Dr Claire Armstrong, Chief Executive of Legion Scotland, said: “It was incredibly moving to see the country join together to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of VE Day last week – particularly in such challenging circumstances. While this was a day to celebrate, it is vital that we also remember less triumphant periods of our history. The ‘Forgotten 51st’ should be forgotten no more.”

At 10am on 12th June 2020, pipers up and down Scotland will take to their doorsteps and play the haunting pipers march, *Heroes of St Valéry*.

And in Banchory the legion have asked me to lead a short, socially distanced, memorial service at 10 am at the Gordon highlanders memorial at which we will have a piper.

So maybe when we think about it, we are doing better than we thought at keeping Jesus greatest

commandment to love our neighbour as our self during this time of lockdown in many ways.

The challenge as ever will be to work out just what we need to keep going in the near future when the restrictions on gathering with others are relaxed.

Peace be with you

Amen