

## Thought for the Day

*Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.*

*For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>*

*Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)*

*Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.*

**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> December**

**1 John 2.3-11**

'There is nothing new under the sun.' I expect you know that saying, that's a quote from Ecclesiastes actually but I thought of it while reading today's passage. John wrote 'I am writing you no new commandment but an old commandment'.

There is a sense in which all of the New Testament, the new covenant or agreement between God and us humans, is already in the Old Testament.

Of course you can draw up a list of contrasts – Israel, the Gentiles; animal sacrifices; none; and so on. That's easy. But looking a touch closer we find all of the 'new' contained within the Old. The new commandment that John referred to was the command to love, and that one we find all over the OT. God's love for us is all over it, and God's longing for our love in return, ditto. All the stern passages of judgement and warning also spring from love, disappointed, rejected love. Indifference doesn't bother to rebuke.

Of course Jesus as the incarnate Son of God is new - and yet he is presaged all through the prophets, he is Son of David and a child of Abraham, fulfilling the promise of descendants more numerous than the sand on the seashore or the stars in the sky.

What about the whole system of sacrifices, no longer needed after the death of Christ. Well even there, the OT is clear that God does not need the flesh of bulls to eat; that ritual and sacrifice are all very well but actually what God wants of us is justice and mercy. And forgiveness – forgiveness was always available to us in spades, whenever we repent. Look at old Jonah, preaching to Nineveh and how annoyed he was at the generous forgiveness of God.

So this is why John writes this is 'no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning'. 'Yet' he says 'yet it is a new commandment, because the true light is now shining', the light of the Christ in the world.

So to take a radical stance, why do we need the NT? Perhaps it is a new 'take' on the old. A bit like Jesus reinterpreting the 10 commandments in the Sermon on the Mount – taking them inside us, not just as outward observance but motive, intention, thought is included. It's the same commandment; it just bites much more.

A new 'take' may be needed to make us notice what it was all along. The familiar can get too familiar, we get used to it and we stop noticing. And we were really not listening, in OT times. Identifying with the people of God in Scripture because they represent all of us, we were not listening, and it did need a new approach. A more personal, direct approach. So God sent his Son. Putting it another way, God rolled up his sleeves and got stuck in himself. From birth in humble origins to death in the lowest disgrace, God incarnate lived out the message of the OT. Showed us what it really meant all along. And for those who were watching and listening and whose hearts were open, the scales fell from their eyes. Oh right! That's what it was all about! I never realised! Wow, why did no-one tell us!

Sometimes it takes shock tactics to get a message across and Jesus used those - like when

he overturned the tables in the temple. In a way the story of Christmas is shock tactics. The strange conception, the stable of Bethlehem, the poverty, the shepherds hearing the news first- real nobodies None of it is what you might expect; but all of it finds explanation in the OT.

The commandment that is new and old, that was always there and is fresh today: walk in the light as he walked in the light. Love one another.

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress.  
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low;  
that we may rejoice in your comfort,  
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love  
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*