In a sense, today’s Gospel reading is the moment when Matthew draws together all of the themes Cara has been exploring from this pulpit over the last few weeks- around who we should serve and what the King’s Son has come to do and who is invited to the feast- which is to say, as God’s children, that we should give God all that God deserves, that Love in Jesus Christ has come to show us how to do that and that the invitation to everyone, as wide as we can imagine and then still more and more and more than that.

And because life is complex and demanding and its challenges are specific and personal and its opportunities to love are unique and precise, God in Jesus does not give us a long list of rules to learn and live by. He gives us instead a role model to follow. Jesus calls his disciples (including us) and says with a smile “Walk with me, watch me, listen to me. Watch me- like a hawk, as Louise Turner always instructs the choir. Listen. Copy. Train your heart to respond to the world’s need and possibility like my heart. Train your heart to respond like God- love God- and then respond- which is about loving neighbour- because God loves them and you just the same- completely, generously, utterly and without limit.”

Jesus gives us the big theme of his life- and that has to become the melody of our own lives also as we hear it sung by him as he heals and witnesses and restores and reunites and recreates everything, wherever he goes. Hesitantly, we learn to hum it and then to sing it in our hearts and in our lives- “I am loved. I am lovable. I am lovely. Thank you, Jesus” and then to face the world and whisper “You are loved. You are lovable. You are lovely. Thanks to Jesus.” Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and mind and body- with everything you have and are- and your neighbour, wherever they are, as yourself.

The melody is woven throughout everything Jesus does and says, in his life and his death and his glorious resurrection. It is woven through all of the ways Jesus leaves us ideas and insights in his parables and healings and teachings and conversations with his disciples. It is the foundation of the Lord’s Prayer. It is the truth of the Parable of the Good Samaritan which, apart from being the most concentrated and inspiring piece of teaching to explain what it looks like when we love our neighbour as ourself, has been so much on my mind in these last weeks as we have prayed for the people of Israel and the people of Gaza and all those who ware grieving for those they love and know who were brutally murdered or blown up. Our neighbours.

That melody of divine love changes everything for us - the way we shop and vote and watch the news and think of those we have hurt or have hurt us, what we do at work and how we treat those who depend on us or who work for us or serve us in a shop. It changes everything to know that *this* is my neighbour. And it must flow into our response to climate change and our response to the hardening and one-dimensional debate around immigration as the General Election draws nearer, and all of the questions which face local, national and global communities.

It does not give us the answer- disciples are never all found on the same side of the debate- but what it should, could, must mean is that we know that even those we are disagreeing with are praying and that they are taking due account of those Jesus spent most of his time with- those who are usually overlooked, uncounted, voiceless. We will not all come to the same conclusion but we know- we need to know- that we have all thought about what our position means for those who have less- and that starts with us.

Which has suddenly got quite big and quite serious. It’s hard to wrestle with. It’s always about the next step with Jesus. We start with walking with Jesus and we go back there over and over again, in worship and scripture and prayer, to test what we are doing against the model, the example, the one who first taught us Love’s melody. And then we do our best, deliberately, carefully, to walk where Jesus walks, loving God as completely as God loves us, loving our neighbour as fully as we are loved. We are not perfect. We can’t heal everything. We can’t get it right every time. But we can keep trying to get the melody right. We can keep trying to love as God does. And, whether we get it right or not, we can make sure that we are always trying to lead with Love as Jesus does, and seeing whoever is involved as a precious child of God and not as a problem, an annoyance, as cartoon evil.

In closing, let me say a little more about how we keep testing our heart against the heart of God. Clearly the answer will be different for each of us- but private prayer and Bible reading and Tithings Groups are absolutely part of it, and so is this Eucharistic feast, which is where we learn what Love does for us in its purest and most focused expression. What does Love do? What does Love look like, we ask? Hold out your hands- take the bread- we need no other answer.

Listen to everything. Step into the drama- the truth, the cost and the beauty of Love’s endeavour- close your eyes and breath it in and take it into your soul- and go deep into the memory whenever you need a touchstone and ask “Does this action, this response, this word, this decision go with the flow of the Eucharistic feast? Is this what Jesus would do from what I know of what Jesus has done, and done for me?”

How do we live Love? Keep going back to Jesus, to the one who first taught us Love’s melody- go back- come home- in our prayers and our reading. Go back- come home- in this feast where we remember how far Love will go to prove itself Love and to prove that Love is the truest and most enduring force in all of creation. And go back- come home- to this community of flawed and precious people who long to know Love a little more. I haven’t mentioned Paul’s 1st Letter to the Church in Thessolonika yet- possibly the earliest section in all of the NT- but it has been in my head in everything I have said because of Paul’s clear love and longing for the Church he founded there and the people he writes to, with such warmth. He uses their shared history as a foundation for everything he says, singing of the things they have endured and the love they share. We can face everything, he says, because of what we have already achieved and the way we did it in Love.

May the same be true of this Church family, this group of disciples, as we, like the Thessalonians, seek to love God as completely as God loves us by loving our neighbours as fully as God loves us. May we too go back- come home- to that Love. May we know ourselves beloved, lovable and lovely. And may we then try to lead with Love as we sing Love’s melody along with all of our neighbours, uniting our voices with the one who is Love unconquered and unconquerable.