

One of the loveliest musicals I've seen on stage, now almost 50 years ago, is *Fiddler on the Roof*, which tells the story of a Jewish family in the early 1900s in Russia while the country is in turmoil and society is changing. The family is made up of husband and wife in an arranged marriage, and with 3 nubile daughters, hopeful of ideal husbands, but the reality is that probably they have to accept an arranged marriage as well. With their father, Tevja, being a simple milk vendor, their chances of catching a catch, or being able to follow their hearts were not high.

Now married for 25 years, Tevja, in one of the most realistic, yet tender moments of the musical, asks his wife: "Golde, do you love me?" Golde, in a touching song, reflects on her 25 years of washing, cooking, bearing children and labouring beside her husband, answers Tevja, "I suppose I do." It's a well-thought-out answer. With no stars in her eyes, her hair greying, her hands calloused, and her constant awareness of him and their children, this served as the evidence that verified the answer.

I am sharing this story, because it reminds me of what we've heard Jesus say in our Gospel today: "If you love me you will keep my commandments."

We're not too good at marrying the two concepts of love and commandments together. We are more inclined to consider love as a quality that comes from the heart, while commandments are an imposition from outside and often observed grudgingly.

Yet, when you think about it, this linking of love and commandments together are not such a strange marriage. In fact, it is what happens in every good marriage, where over the years husband and wife grow closer together as they become more attuned to each other, knowing the other's preferences and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, and accommodate themselves to what helps the marriage grow stronger and more considerate of each other. It is as we hear in another wonderful song: "Love changes everything."

When in today's Gospel we hear Jesus talk to his disciples, and therefore to us as well, about loving him, he is talking about something more than

ordinary friendship, or that of children for their parents, or even that of spouses for each other. He is talking about our loving him in the same way as he loves the Father and the Father loves Him, - totally at one with each other, undivided and inseparable.

That's a big ask, although some of our fear about what his commandments may involve may come from the unknown of what these commandments may be. Could it be the advice which Jesus gave to the rich young man: "If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven, - then come and follow me."

Or the injunction: "Those who love father or mother, son or daughter more than me are not fit to be my disciples; Those who do not take up their cross and follow in my steps are not fit to be my disciples. Those who try to gain their own life will lose it; but those who lose their life for my sake will gain it."

It's a question of where we begin. If we focus is first of all on ourselves and what it may cost us to follow Jesus, then we'll balk at the cost, but if we begin with the love that's been given: "Love one another as I have loved you," then a totally different picture emerges.

Then it is focused on how Jesus quite naturally responded to the situations in which he found himself: To the leper who said, "if you want to you can heal me", his response was, "Of course I want to, be healed." Or to the blind man at Jericho who wanted to see again: "Then see, your faith has made you well."

Or, conversely, it could be as he found himself before Pilate, being asked: "So, you are a king then?", and his integrity would not allow him to fudge the truth, but to admit: "Yes, I am a king, I was born for this and I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth, and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice."

In calling us to love him Jesus is asking us to share his heart, to live from the heart as he did, and as we have seen in our Australian saint, St. Mary of the Cross McKillop, whose motto in life was to "Never see a need without doing something about it." Can we really call ourselves Australian and Christian if we do any less than that?