

**Summary of Sermon given by Rev'd Richard Sewell on the occasion of a
Thanksgiving Service for Ann and Sigrun**

July 2016

It's good to know that even after 13 years of ministry that there are new and different things to be done as a priest! In addition to today in recent weeks I did my first ever funeral on a Saturday and a wedding on a Sunday. This would never have happened in times past. The Church must adapt and change but is sometimes a bit slow to do so.

There are many changes taking place in a world and if we are not careful the Church will get left behind completely. Who would have thought that St Mary's would be a Pokemon Gym where right now Pokemon characters are battling it out!

Today we are here to celebrate with Ann and Sigrun their love for one another and for the commitment that they have made in a Civil Partnership. It's a celebration of love – generous, open, selfless loving always brings us close to God, so of course Sigrun and Ann would want to celebrate this day in church. It roots their love in God's love.

The first letter of John declares: "Those who live in love live in God and God lives in them". This is not only the love of two people making a commitment to one another but all types of love, of parents and children of brothers and sisters, of friends. Love is what turns us away from ourselves to help, support and nurture others. But of all these, the love that we freely enter into, commit to for our whole lives and continue to choose through thick and thin is especially significant. It demands great things of us but it also bears great fruit in our lives. It is the bedrock on which flourishing communities are founded.

In this 400th year of the death of Shakespeare we have been richly reminded, at least in Britain, of the wonderful legacy that this greatest of English writers has bequeathed to us. His writing whether historical or fictional, comedy or tragedy plumbs the depths of human experience and not least the nature of love. His works explore the power of love found, lost and redeemed. We see this richly described in the love of Beatrice and Benedick, Kate and Petrucio, Rosalind and Orlando and of Juliet and Romeo. Loves that make us laugh and cry; loves that warn and entice. But he writes powerfully not just of lovers but of fathers and daughters in King Lear and of sons and mothers in Hamlet. Love has the power to make us and break us – it is truly a life's work.

Our lives may not (hopefully?) have as much drama in them as the worlds that Shakespeare conjures up but we hope there will be any amount of Comedy and there will certainly be a degree of Tragedy. That is that the nature of human experience. But this is what Ann and Sigrun and committing themselves to. To face these things together, to be steadfast, to encourage, uphold and challenge one another: to love and to love and to keep on loving. And we are delighted for you that you have one another.

But all of this takes place in the context of God's love for us all. The heart of the human condition is our need for love. A need which in the end can only truly be satisfied by the knowledge of the love of God which reaches out to us and calls us home. But this love is often mediated for us through the relationships that really matter. We become agents of God's love to each other. Not just those who are family and friends but actually to a far wider circle. It is love that challenges us to reach out to welcome and care for those beyond our circle of familiarity. And that love is needed now perhaps more than ever before.

Amen.