

10 June 2018
Without Love



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INTRODUCTION

I am not very good at it but I do enjoy cooking. When friends or family come for a meal it is nice to look through my books or google to find a new recipe. I will look through the ingredients and think I have got that or no I have not got that. Some things can be substituted or left out but some things are vital. I like carrot cake for example and the recipe I use includes nuts as well which I leave out as friends have nut allergy and it is fine without them. But I would not leave the carrots out or would not be carrot cake. It wouldn't be what it was supposed to be.

Today is the second in our sermon series looking at love and my title is "Without Love". I would suggest that love is something that cannot be substituted or left out, it is a vital ingredient to our lives and the life of the church.

GOD'S LOVE

Our key passage for our sermon series comes of course from 1 Corinthians 13 which is often read at weddings. I always think of George Thomas, Lord Tonypan, reading it in his super welsh accent at the wedding of Charles and Diana in St Paul's cathedral.

This chapter comes in the middle of some teaching about the ministry of the church, on the celebration of the lords supper, on spiritual gifts, on what it is to be the body of Christ, on worship.

As Vicar Paul explained last week, the love that Paul is talking about is not romantic love, but Agape love, self-giving love that comes from God . For as we read in 1 John:-

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Before I go any further just hear that God loves you. If you do not know that, please talk to us, look at the cross at the front of church or read the Bible so that you may discover and receive God's love for you.

The apostle Paul is urging the church at Corinth to make love their aim, the best way of all. Paul's teaching is as relevant for us here in Chelmsford as it was to those in Corinth.

Love is a vital ingredient so let us consider what might happen without love.

CLANGING CYMBAL

If I speak in the tongues[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

The streets of Corinth resounded with the sound noisy gongs and clashing cymbals played by people as part of their cult and pagan worship. It was not nice to listen to; no melody, no harmony. In chapter 8 Paul writes "*We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up while love builds up*".

If spiritual gifts, such as tongues are not used in love the result is that others will be offended, there will be disharmony, no melody. Without love words, however eloquent or articulate or spiritual, will be hollow and empty. One commentator I read wrote "*anyone who is taken up with saying rather than doing has become nothing more than sound. The best speech of earth or heaven, without love, is only a noise.*"

WITHOUT LOVE I AM NOTHING

1 Corinthians 13 verse 2: If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

Let me tell you a story:

The monks loved to serve God in lots of different ways. They prayed and gave weary travellers a bed for the night. They looked after sick people and sang praises to God in their services. But the years passed and the monks grew old. Although their hearts were truer to God than ever, their voices grew cracked and hoarse. Their once-beautiful singing sounded like a farmyard of animals honking and squawking and wheezing. The Abbot was very troubled. 'This singing sounds terrible!', he said to the brothers. 'Brother Andrew sounds like a strangled turkey! Brother Francis sounds like a dying pig! Brother Mark sounds like a squashed frog! How can this awful noise be pleasing to God?' The monks agreed to pray about it.

That night a stranger arrived at the monastery door. He was a traveller who had lost his way and needed a bed for the night. The monks welcomed him in and gave him hot soup and fresh bread. 'Where are you going?' they asked him. 'To the National Opera House,' the young man replied proudly. 'I am an opera singer and I have a big part to sing in the gala next week.'

'A singer?' said the Abbot. 'What a godsend! Could you possibly sing instead of us in the service tonight? Your voice would do far greater honour to God than the sounds we make.'

The opera singer was delighted to show off in front of the old men. 'I'll show them how to sing!' he thought.

That night, the chapel was filled with his glorious voice, echoing through the chapel like the voice of an angel. The monks were so thrilled that they forgot to pray. They thanked the young man and went to bed, marvelling at what they had heard.

That night, the Abbot had a dream. In his dream, God spoke to him and said, 'What was the matter with my dear servants? Why did no one sing for me in the chapel tonight?'

'Lord,' said the Abbot. 'At last we could give you real praise tonight. Didn't you hear the wonderful singing?'

'I heard nothing from the chapel tonight,' said God sadly. 'Usually it is your love for me that I hear, not the quality of your voices. But that young man only loved himself, so I could hear nothing at all.'

The Abbot woke up and told the other monks his dream. They were all deeply ashamed that they had forgotten to pray to God the night before. They asked God's forgiveness and then they were filled with such joy that they thought their hearts would burst. God loved them! He had missed them when they didn't sing! They rushed to the chapel and lifted up their voices in praise once more. In heaven God smiled. He didn't hear the wheezing, gasping and croaking. It was their love that he heard once again.

However gifted or talented, slick or proficient somebody may appear to be in their Christian service, however wise and learned, however admired and applauded, if there is no love in God's eyes it is nothing. But when love and gift and talents are combined together they become something beautiful for God.

WITHOUT LOVE I GAIN NOTHING

1 Corinthians 13 verse 3: If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Paul now mentions two acts of self-sacrifice which would appear to be love of the purest and most unselfish kind. But if they are motivated by self-interests and not the interest of others nothing is gained. Without love God is not glorified through what we give and offer, do or say.

GOD IS LIGHT

God is love, God is light in him there is not darkness at all. Without light there is darkness, fear, no growth, danger. But with light, with God's love there is hope and life and growth and safety.

LOVE AT THE CENTRE

In our Gospel reading we are reminded of Jesus teaching: *"The most important commandment " answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

Without love we are ignoring, turning our back, dismissing Jesus teaching.

IN CONCLUSION

We do lots of very worthwhile things here at church and in our own lives; Open Door, Our community weekend, Little Fishes, Youth cub, teaching, nursing and so on. I hope and pray that all that we do will have agape love as a foundation, will have agape love running through, will have agape love at the heart and centre. May we do what we do following the loving example of Jesus, who shows us what love looks like. May we do what we do in love to show our love for God to God and to others.

May the love of Jesus very deliberately and intentionally be the foundation on which we worship, share together and serve at St Andrews.

We celebrated Pentecost a few weeks ago, love is of course one of the fruits of the holy spirit. We need to allow the spirit to work in our lives to help us change. Love in our lives, in our church needs to be nurtured, to be encouraged. We may, as we considered in Lent, need to prune or remove those things that stop us receiving and growing in God's love.

When the music group introduce us to a new song they have had to spend time listening to it and learning it, practicing it and then they share it with us. To begin with we struggle and think no this is not familiar, but often in time we get there and the song is lodged in our head and we can't stop singing it. To love with agape, self-giving love that comes from God may be like learning a new song in our hearts. There is a discipline, we need to work at it, we may need to stop singing songs of hate, of negativity, of bitterness. May we let God write a new song in our hearts, a song of his greatness and goodness and love.

To know more of God's love in our life we need to spend time with him, to meet with him in sacrament, prayer, worship and his word and world. To look at the cross again and again to remember and respond to how much God loves you.

Without love here at St Andrews we would be missing a very essential ingredient and we would not be what we are supposed and called to be. But if we are a place where true love is found, God himself will be there.