



On Sunday we explored the origins and implications of the '**Greater love**' in the Bible passage that is quoted everywhere on Remembrance Day. We acknowledge, with gratitude, the sacrifice of those who gave up their lives so that we might enjoy the freedoms and ways of life that we cherish. **Read John 15: 9 – 17.**

What kind of love is 'Greater Love'? (Greek – *agape*)

- The Greeks had at least four different words for 'love' and the one used here is not the one used for romantic love or even for close love between family or friends. It is a special word expressing a total, self-giving love - utterly without limits. Verses 13 could start: "Greater self-giving-ness"
- We may well despair of the worth of war; but there are also countless stories of selfless courage and service: 'good' stories that move and inspire and may help the bereaved in their loss.
- *Agape* is not confined to the front line:
 - In a POW camp a Polish priest substituted his life for that of a randomly condemned father.
 - In 2012 children in a US primary school were saved by their class-teacher's sacrificial bravery.
 - A number of doctors and nurses volunteering to care for Ebola sufferers died themselves.
 - Offering oneself in self-giving love doesn't always involve death: E.g. Mother Teresa; and the many sacrifices parents make for their children and then children for their ageing parents.

The Source of Self-giving Love.

- God Himself – love is the very essence of God's being. **1 John 4: 7-8-12.** Love is the basis of the Trinitarian relationship within the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit all continually giving to each other.
- **Jn. 15:9:** Jesus testifies to the love he receives from the Father and in **v.10** to His love for the Father.
- Such love between Father and Son goes back to before the world began, **John 17:4.** It is timeless, it is part of humanity because we are all made in His image. The image is spoilt by the Fall, but not ruined.
- It is not exclusive to Christians, as demonstrated by the examples above but it should be our hallmark

The Standard of Self-giving Love.

- **Jn. 15:12:** Jesus' self-giving knew no limits. He has set the bar so high, we will be bound to fail.
- Jesus voluntarily obeyed His Father commands – **Jn. 10:17-18.** So with us: *Agape* love is not a feeling, you can't command a feeling: it is an act of the will. It is a decision which must be made voluntarily.
- *Agape* runs counter to many of our human tendencies and contemporary attitudes. We may feel unable to bear the cost. But Jesus won't shoot us in disgrace if we let Him down: we know that from His gracious dealing with Simon Peter after the resurrection, restoring him to fruitful ministry.

The significance of Self-giving Love.

- **Jn. 15:13** is referring specifically to Jesus' own unsurpassable act of amazing, divine love. He knew He was going to take the penalty for your sins and mine, to restore our broken relationships with God.
- Like the priest in the POW camp, Jesus took our place. Like the primary school teacher facing the gunman, Jesus died that we might live. Like 'Josh' in the wonderful allegory at the beginning of the sermon (*listen to it on the web!*) Jesus went right into the enemy camp and detonated a bomb under the sin that had a complete hold on us all, so transforming us from His enemies into 'friends for ever'.
- For 'love never fails' **1 Cor. 13** (*the word for 'love' throughout this famous passage is agape*). Even when it seems our years of self-giving were in vain, we can be assured that the *agape* was never a failure. Love is a virtue that carries forward into the new heaven and the new earth. *Agape* love never fails, it remains along with faith and hope – but the greatest of them all is love, **1 Cor. 13: 13.**

Questions for discussion:

1. Can we think of any war stories that have inspired admiration, respect or even faith in human nature?
2. In what ways can self-giving love change someone's life or prospects? Can it ever become unbearable?
3. Look again at how Jesus demonstrates love for His Father **v.10**. How do we ensure that love is our hallmark?
4. How can we counter the loveless attitudes that have surfaced recently in the wake of inflammatory politics?
5. Can we think of an individual, or a group of people who you might be being called to 'love more dearly'?
6. If *agape* never fails – does that mean we take it, or its effects, with us into heaven?