



This week we are considering 'Sacrificial Love' which is another gleaming facet of the 'jewel of our faith', the cross. Mothering Sunday is a great day to explore the meaning of love: we're celebrating the love of mothers in particular, but we are also in the middle of our Lenten series about the meaning of the cross. The two are related because real love, for a Christian is inherently about self-giving. **Read 1 John 4: 7-16 and Romans 5: 7-8.**

1. What do we mean by 'Love'?

- Popular culture champions romantic love and falling in love: you are sorely deficient if are not 'in love
- However, the highest form of love in the Bible is (Gk.) *agapē* – untranslatable as one English word.
- *Agapē* love is self-giving and gracious. It serves someone else's best interests at a cost to oneself. *Agapē* love gives without demanding or expecting re-payment. *Agapē* is our God's very nature.

2. God is Love. 1 John 4: 8-10.

- **V. 8:** Love describes the character and heart of God: compassionate Love is His essential nature, His very being. However, Love does not eliminate His holiness, nor negate His perfect justice. Instead, we know that God's is a loving holiness and a loving justice. Everything God does expresses His love.
- **V. 9:** We know there is no greater act of love than for someone to give up their life to save other people. Very sadly, we saw this happen this week in Westminster when PC Keith Palmer was killed ... Christians look at the cross of Jesus and see the Love of God revealed to us in all its fullness:
 - We see the love of Jesus as he lays down His perfect life, taking the weight of all our pride and wickedness so that we can be set free to receive and live in God's love eternally.
 - We see the love of the Father as He sacrifices His Son to save us. And *agapē* love lasts for ever
- **V. 10:** Jesus died **for our sins**. God gave His Son to die for **sinners**. We might be able to imagine paying a great price to save someone really deserving – but Christ died for those who had turned their backs on Him. God's *agapē* love is both infinitely rich and deeply challenging. **Cf. Romans 5: 7-8**

3. Response to the call to Love 1 John 4: 7; 11- 16.

- "Beloved, let us Love" - "*Agapētoi, agapētōmen* ": a wonderful two word summary of Christianity.
 - FIRST, we are loved. The Love of God defines Him and also defines us through His unconditional positive regard for all who are accepted in the same way as the prodigal son was accepted in the parable. God's *Agape* is revealed fully in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and poured into our hearts by His Spirit.
 - SECONDLY, let us Love one another – not to earn God's love but because we are loved by God, have received His Love, & live in its light. We that know God must be able to Love one another in Christ's body.
- Application – we need to ask ourselves whether our loving is costly. Serving someone else's best interests is always costly, whether in parenting, in marriage, in friendships, or in community life.
- Love is costly in terms of energy, time, in the use of our money, and in how we relate to our enemies:
 - Do we pray for political enemies, for government leaders with whom we fundamentally disagree?
 - Are our prayers informed about the persecuted church? Do we pray for those who torture and imprison our brothers and sisters because of their faith in Christ? [Useful websites: Open Doors or the Barnabas Fund]
 - Do we pray for difficult relations, do we show them love (within the wisdom of healthy boundaries)? Do we pray for argumentative friends, impossible kids, appalling family members?

Beloved, let us love one another. 1 John 4:8.

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 Thoughts to ponder:

While the origin of love is in the being of God, the manifestation of love is in the coming of Christ. (*John Stott- Tyndale*)
 The Cross is the primary expression of the relevance of God's love for everyone from the beginning of time to its end.
 Verse 12: When we love each other, God dwells in us and His love is made complete in us!