



Welcome to our Sunday Service (25/04/21)

# *Loving God, loving people*

*Prepared by Kathryn*

O the deep, deep love of Jesus  
Vast unmeasured, boundless, free  
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me  
Underneath me, all around me,  
Is the current of Thy love  
Leading onward, leading homeward to  
Thy glorious rest above

O the deep, deep love of Jesus  
Tis a heaven of heavens to me  
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee  
O the deep, deep love of Jesus  
Spread His praise from shore to shore  
How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth  
Never, nevermore

By Audrey Assad

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

1 John Ch 3

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dis-honour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13

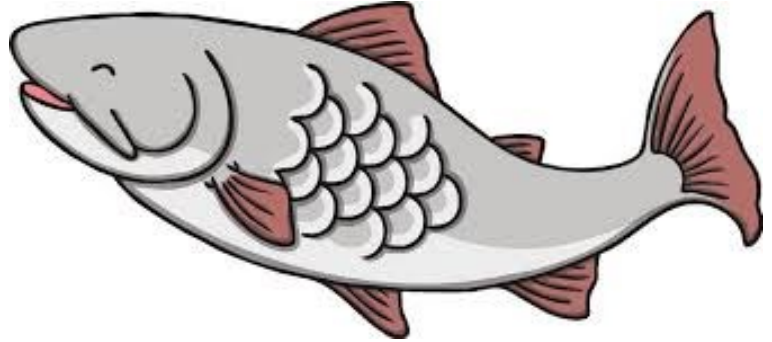


Let's pray... Lord God, you are my strength. Hold my hand in my weakness and teach my heart to fly. With you, there's nothing to fear, nothing to worry about. Hold me tight in your embrace, so that I can be stronger than the challenges in my life. Amen

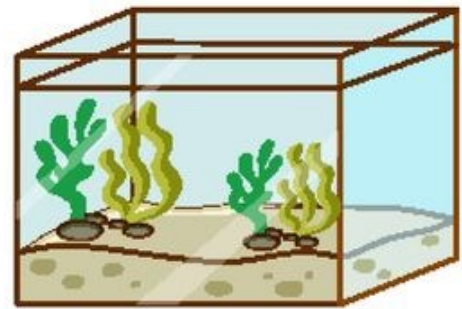


## Loving God, Loving People

What is love? It's very hard to pin down. It is the theme of nearly every song, story or film and yet when we try to actually catch hold of it and say, '*This is love,*' It slips out of our grasp like a slippery fish that is too big and robust to be put into a fish tank!



The dictionary gives two definitions of love, one a more casual meaning when we might use the word "love" to describe something we like or enjoy. "I love ice cream". The other definition for love is ... an intense feeling of affection.



This definition is a bit like the fish tank and if we call the fish 'love' then it's just too big, too strong, too powerful to be contained within the definition of an intense feeling!

If love is just a strong feeling, then we run into trouble, because as we talked about last week, feelings are unreliable, they change and are often driven by other factors. This definition on it's own raises so many questions.

Often when a young couple are seeking to get married and they visit the vicar or pastor to discuss their plans, he or she might ask the couple, 'why do you wish to get married?' to which the reply is often, 'because we love each other!'. Is that enough? Is it enough to base a lifetimes decision on a strong feeling that you both have at that time, or is there more to it? What about when the intense feeling of affection wears off, or life takes a different direction to the one that you had hoped for and the feelings are swamped or obliterated by hard times?

We see it all around us; people who have moved on or abandoned the person they said they loved, because the feelings they had wore off and what they thought was love failed, often leaving a trail of hurting people who have also been let down by this thing called love.

If an intense feeling of affection is the base line, then how is it even possible to say to someone....'I am going to love you for the rest of my life.' Love has to be more than a feeling if it's going to endure. **But what about attraction in whatever confusing context that may be, is that love, and if we have those feelings of attraction, does love automatically permit those feelings to be pursued regardless, or does love require us to make tough decisions sometimes?**

If a strong feeling is the complete definition of love, then the pursuit of love is the most risky pastime, because it can so easily let us down, leave us feeling rejected, our world shattered and our heart broken. **We were created to be loved and to love and our love source was always meant to be God.**

In order to truly define love, we have to go to the one who is Love, the source of love who is himself the definition of love. The source of love is God. God is Love and love is God.

Our experience of human love, although still coming from God, (the source) will be massively diluted, mis represented and usually based on complex feelings, attraction, or even at best may be operating imperfectly in some way as it filters through human brokenness and disconnect. Whereas love at source is unconditional, forgiving, pouring out blessing, self sacrificing and everlasting, it's human expression is often conditional, unforgiving, taking, self benefitting and short lived. When you compare love at source, (God) with the often trashy, shallow, self-seeking love that oozes from so many songs, stories and films and we begin to get an idea why our fish tank definition of love is utterly inadequate.

Today we want to unpack our church mission which has been reduced into just four words and incorporated into our church logo. Four words which means that all of us from the youngest to the oldest can get a handle on what love is and how that plays out in who we are as a church and why we exist. We're going to look at these four words from two perspectives. From the perspective of a loving God whose love flows towards people, and then we'll turn it around to the perspective of us loving God and loving people.

### **Loving God.**

Within the love of God is where we experience love in all it's fulness. Paul's prayer to God for the Ephesians in ch:3 was that .....

**“.... out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,<sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God”.**





That source of love is flowing from God to each one of us and as our first song put it so beautifully, it's underneath me, all around me, like the current of a mighty ocean, vast, unmeasured, boundless and freely flowing in it's fullness over me, leading me ever closer to him, lifting me up to him. This love wraps around every life, flooding our being and taking us way out of our depth in the most powerful force in the universe. Love.



Paul is praying that we would be rooted and established in that love, that we would be strengthened by The Holy Spirit in our innermost being to know the unknowable and grasp dimensions that are unmeasurable. We cannot escape this love - there is no wiggle room to get over it, or under it or even around it.

When a human heart opens itself up to receive the love of God, we are open to the most potent agent for positive change and transformation that exists. You cannot be in the presence of pure love and not be transformed and you cannot live in that love without ongoing transformation. The bible calls it being changed from glory to glory!

### **Loving People**

But more amazing to me is that this incredible God who is a loving God is also 100% into loving people and always has been, with a love that never diminishes, gives up on us, wears thin, loses patience or rejects us. He is continuously and consistently loving people throughout every generation with an unfailing love which is something I really struggle to understand. What reason could he possibly have to love us, we are such unworthy recipients of his love? Would you be able to love those whose way of life, thoughts, attitudes and behaviour patterns were utterly repugnant to you, and at polar opposites to all that you are, whose values are so far removed from your own? Would you consistently love those who are offensive towards you, who rubbish your existence, trash and disrespect your creativity and your name, even committing horrific atrocities in your name? People who do not give the credit, or the glory, or thanks for all the incredible things you had made and good things you continued to shower upon them? What about people who are constantly unfaithful, insincere in their commitments and words, full of resentments and grudges? Would you be able to love people like that? Would we seek out the company of people we find rude, selfish, ungrateful, two faced, mean, malicious or poisoned with bitterness? People who use us when they want something and drop us when they don't, people who betray us, deceive us, cheat on us, ignore us? Why on earth would God love people when we do all those things to him?

And yet we see our loving God, loving people, loving us. How incredible is that?

Placing such value on us that he is prepared to reach down into the filthiest pit, the most complicated mess, move mountains that seem unmoveable and pour in unfailing, transformational love, swamping us with mercy and kindness, redeeming and restoring our lives. More than that, he was willing to experience those things first hand, take them into himself, take the blame and pay the price, taking the full judgement of God, abandoned on a Roman cross of crucifixion in the darkness. Earlier when we sang about the love of God as an ocean, we begin to get a sense of the vastness of that ocean as we take some time to contemplate the cost of God loving people when there was nothing about us to merit his love.

**Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Romans 5: 7-8**

Let's look at the same four words in relation to ourselves. Firstly.....

### **... Loving God.**

If we have been impacted by the enormity of God's love In our situation, his kindness leads into a place of repentance where we find ourselves forgiven and able to respond by loving him, and growing in love with him and love for him as we journey with him. We also as a body of people who are loving God come together as his church, his bride to participate in loving God and expressing that love corporately through our worship.



The only reason that we have this incredible honour and privilege of loving God is because he loved us first. It is his love that first changes our hearts in order to make us capable of love.

**There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. 1 John: 4**

We were at a wedding a few years ago and when the groom stood up to give his speech, he broke down in tears and said, "I can't believe she's mine, she's way out of my league!" This love relationship with God is way out of our league, and yet he came looking for us. He doesn't grade us in leagues, he values each one of us and sees us in our transformed condition!

I wonder how many of us are in relationships or marriages because someone loved us first, and set out to win our hearts in special ways. There was a couple that we knew in a previous church who shared their story. The man really wanted to sweep his girlfriend off her feet, so that she would agree to marry him.

This happened about 30 years ago, so the scenario that this man set up probably wouldn't be allowed to happen now! His girlfriend was a nurse working in the hospital and so he organised someone on the inside to send her up onto the hospital roof at a certain time with a wheelchair to supposedly greet a patient coming in by helicopter.

In the meantime he organised a private helicopter to fly him to the landing pad on the hospital roof where he hopped out, presented his speechless girl friend with a huge bunch of roses and asked her to marry him. She said YES! By this time a number of staff who were in on the secret had also come onto the roof to watch.

God pulled a stunt far more amazing than that to win our love. Although, the universe was created by him, he allowed himself to be contained within the form of a human baby, growing up and doing life amongst us in order to express his heart, his words, his love so that we who otherwise had no chance of coming close to him could know him as Father.

**He came alongside us to win our hearts, not by forcing us to love him but waiting for us to love him voluntarily.**



He doesn't turn us into robots and programme us to love him. He wants us to love him in response to his amazing love for us that we don't deserve and did nothing to earn.

We love him because he loved us first, because he has won our hearts by the lengths he went to to show us we're loved, and the blessings and benefits he pours over us as he walks with us and prepares us to be with him forever.

Now if we have experienced a tiny taste God's love impacting our hearts, then we have been exposed to the source of love himself, love that is measureless, full of compassion and mercy, is understanding and patient, doesn't treat us or judge us as we deserve, see's past whatever mess we've made and see's who we can become in his love. It begins to dawn on us who love is and what love looks like, how it behaves.

We begin to sense that for us, love can *no longer be just a feeling of affection, but a deliberate choice* to represent a love which loves the unlovable, loves those who don't love us, even loves those who are actually our enemies. Why? Because that is how God loves us! It is the love of God to us that awakens our hearts to the true definition of love and in turn represents that love to others.

Some of us around a certain age may know that great song by Don Francisco entitled... **“Love is not a feeling, it’s an act of your will”.**

When Jesus died on the cross for you and me, it wasn’t about feelings, It was a choice, an act of his will to love to the uttermost, to the greatest degree possible, to the extreme limit, to love to completion.

### **Loving People.**

The bible assumes that if we love God, we love people... **Those who say, “I love God” and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. After all, those who don’t love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen! 1 John 4:20**

**Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:7**

If we are proactively loving God, then we will also be proactively loving people. What kind of people? Is it just nice people, well mannered people, people with a good education living ‘on top’, financially secure lives? God also expects us as people whom he loves and who love him to represent his transforming love to those whom society rejects, those with challenging behaviours, those without the social skills, good manners or general appropriateness to fit in.

Back to our dictionary definition. Is love truly just an intense feeling of affection? We have seen today that if we look at God who is the source of love, we get to see how loves conducts itself, and our definition of love becomes very much more profound. The world says: “Love is a feeling.” God says: “Love is also a choice, a radical decision.”

Some years ago a friend of mine was telling me about a dinner date that she went on with her husband to celebrate their wedding anniversary. Over dinner, she asked him a question hoping to get a romantic answer, and was instead given an answer that initially didn’t go down too well , but was actually very profound and showing a much deeper grasp of the question than she had bargained for. Here’s what she asked him... “On our wedding day, were you head over heels in love with me?” He replied...

“On our wedding day, I made a decision to love you”

**The world says:  
“Love is a feeling.”**

**God says:  
“Love is a decision.”**





To close, I want us to read some words from **1 Corinthians 13**, the famous passage about love so often read at weddings and yet in it's original context it was written to Christian believers in the church as a framework for how love conducts itself.

**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.**

As those whose lives have been touched by the love of God, this is our highest calling as individuals and as a church. We are in relationship with a loving God who is continually loving people. Our hearts have been won over by the demonstration of his love towards us and we are now loving God in return, reflecting the love he shows us by loving people.

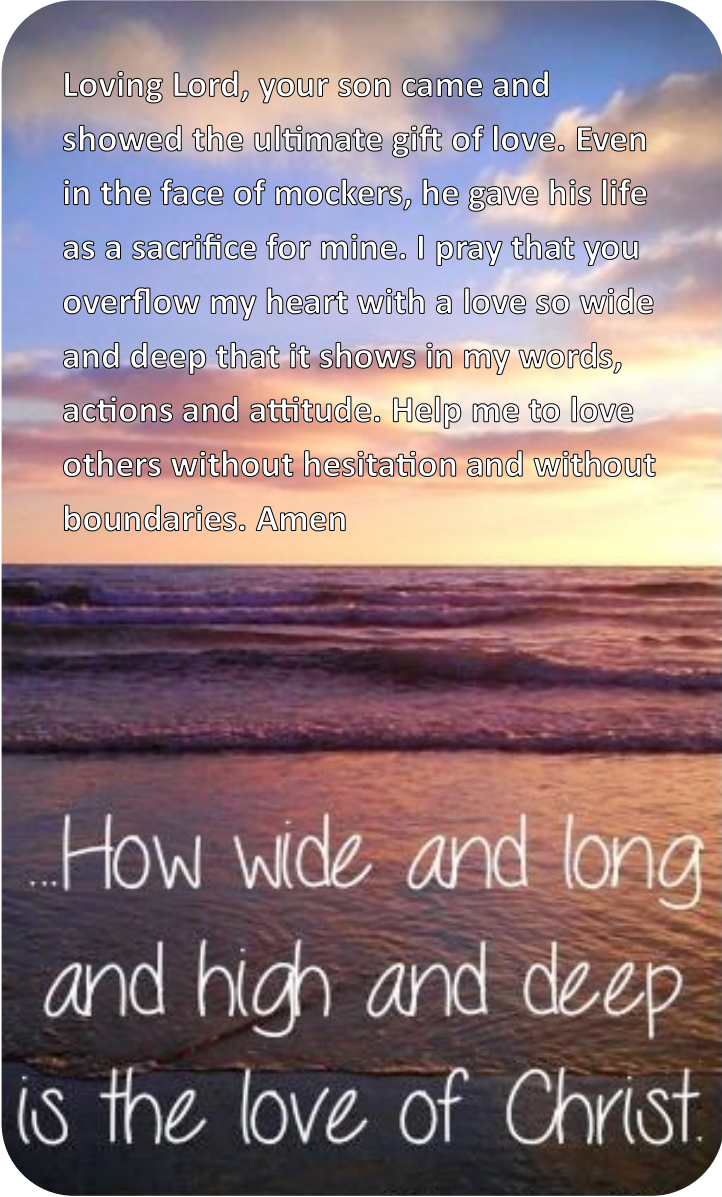
If we use 1 Corinthians 13 as a filter that we put our feelings of affection or attraction through, then we will see that sometimes our pursuit of those feelings is dis-honouring or dis-respectful to God and to the other person, it is not seeking their best, but is actually self seeking. Sometimes love says NO!

There are 4 characteristics in that passage which I personally refer to as my highest calling in my relationships with others. I haven't perfected them and sometimes I fail big time, but it is my aspiration and my goal and I leave them with you now .....

**1) Love always hopes! 2) Always trusts!  
3) Always protects! 4) Always perseveres!**

However dis-illusioned, or angry or 'out of love' you may feel in your relationships or friendships..... ALWAYS hope that God will bring wholeness into that persons life, ALWAYS trust that God will do it, ALWAYS protect that person during the process, and ALWAYS persevere in hoping, trusting and protecting. This is LOVE, our highest calling.

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of The Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore.  
Amen.**



Loving Lord, your son came and showed the ultimate gift of love. Even in the face of mockers, he gave his life as a sacrifice for mine. I pray that you overflow my heart with a love so wide and deep that it shows in my words, actions and attitude. Help me to love others without hesitation and without boundaries. Amen

...How wide and long  
and high and deep  
is the love of Christ.