

GOD IS LOVE

(1 John 4.7-21, John 3.13-17)

There is a lot to say about love when it comes to God. He is love, he abounds in love, he gives love unconditionally and he never stops loving us - you, me, our family, friends, neighbours and yes, even Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin. God is love and there is so much of it, so how do we fit it all in today? We don't.

Ann is sharing this with me today; in the past we have often shared God's word together as that is why (amongst other things) he put us together. It's our 30th wedding anniversary tomorrow and to quote our Lord, "therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, they shall become one flesh." Thank you, Ann.

Ann's Part

Early December, I felt in my spirit that I was to study the love of God our Father. I remember I stood out in front of church and said that I didn't trust people and sometimes it felt like I didn't trust God either.

Yet when we know that we are loved, trust and love go hand in glove. I also know that God's love is perfect, it is not subject to variation.

What did vary was my own awareness of God's loving presence. So I asked myself who moved? Not God! Because he says "I will never leave you or forsake you."

What happened is I tended to feel unworthy of God's love, especially when I'd been dissatisfied with my own behaviour. Then unconsciously I'd punish myself by withdrawing from him. I'd then attribute the distance between us as God's displeasure with me and rather than returning to him and receiving his love, I attempted to try harder to earn his approval. Yet all the time his everlasting arms were just waiting to enfold me in his love.

I started to look at scriptures about the love of God, and a few days later I read something by Joyce Meyer: "The Bible tells us that God loves us but many of his children still lack revelation concerning God's love. The truth is very few of God's people really know how much God loves them. Would we act differently if we really understood how much God loves us?"

That really challenged me and, as she suggested reading 1 John 4, I started to study it. I got up early on the 27th of December, I was now about halfway through the chapter. I started to read verse 18: "There is no fear in love; dread does not exist, but full grown, complete, perfect love turns fear out of doors and expels every trace of terror. For fear brings with it the thought of punishment and so he who is afraid has not reached the full maturity of love, is not yet grown into love's complete perfection."

Reading that verse was like having a light bulb suddenly switched on, as I sat there quietly, I realised that as a child, I was always afraid to tell my parents about anything bad that had happened to me because it would probably involve a punishment. If I'd done something wrong then it was my fault, and if something bad had happened to me, it must be my fault too, was my childish way of thinking. And as a child you certainly never told anyone about the family's business. So, I learnt at an early age to keep things to myself.

What a revelation of my wrong behaviour, that I've carried all my life and the effect it's had on my relationships, now God is able to minister his love and grace, love is patient, kind, humble, ready to believe the best at all times and never keeps a record of wrongs.

The willingness to do these things is what love is all about, love is an effort and it always costs something. Jesus gave his life for me, for you, he's patient with us, forgives us when we say "Sorry, Lord." He's always seen the best in me and has borne my weaknesses, faults and failures. He doesn't keep long lists of when I've failed him and he's there to help and encourage. That's love, perfect love, and by meditating on the scriptures, by thinking about his love for me, which is unconditional, his

love is becoming more and more a reality to me. I'm comforted by this; knowing that he loves me and that I no longer have to live in fear.

Brian Returns

Only through revelation do we learn that God loves us, having our eyes opened by the word of God or by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we realise more and more just how much that love is. There are so many verses in the Bible for us to read about God's love. John, the last remaining disciple from the original 12 lived for more than 50 years after Jesus' death but he never forgot that Jesus loved him.

John, the one whom Jesus loved, the one in exile on Patmos, but allowed to write - and write he did. His book of Revelation continues after 2,000 years to defy our reasoning and understanding of his visions of the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus will come again, and when he does, it won't be as a sacrificial lamb but as the King of kings and Lord of lords, the world will have never seen anything like it. Are you ready for his return?

In John's writings, he expresses in verse after verse God's love for his children, that's us. Yes, God loves the world, but they don't get it, they don't see it and they certainly don't feel it. Have any of you had an experience where you felt the tangible presence of God? I am sure many of you have but it's not all about feelings, it's about our faith, our reaction to hearing God's word, reading God's word.

Like Ann said, sometimes you have to get there by studying your Bible. You should trust your faith in God that he loves you more than the feeling of it. A dear lady from my days in the Methodist church once sent me a quote, "I TRUST IN GOD BUT I STILL HAVE TO STUDY" she knew what I was like!

As a boy, I never felt loved. My parents were separated, it was the 1950's and people didn't show affection like they do today - well not in my family. I was looked after by my sister who, at 4 years older than me, was not happy at looking after her little brother who, to be fair, was a little menace. I am sure my family loved me then but they didn't show it and I

didn't feel it either. However, at 14 years of age I gave my life to Jesus at an altar call in my church in Southport. I can only tell you in words but the love of God flowed through my whole body, it is still there today at the age of 68. More than 50 years since Jesus, by his Holy Spirit came into my life, just like John on Patmos. Though of course I haven't written any books in the Bible. I did spend 20 of those years running away from God to Iran, Lebanon, Cyprus and Spain but mostly running from myself, not allowing that flow of God's love to flow in me. Crazy I know, as Ann said, "if you think God is far away, who do you think moved?"

In our readings today; in 1 John 4.7-11, he tells us about knowing God through love. In v12-16 he speaks about seeing God through love. In v17-19, John writes that the consummation of love can only be found in God. Finally, as a reminder, he reminds us to be obedient by faith to God's love in v20-21.

In the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus came from heaven as the Son of Man to be lifted up, as Moses did with the snake in the desert that the people might be healed. In the same way, Jesus was lifted up that we might be saved and receive eternal life. John explains; so in the same way, because God loved the people of the world, he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not die eternally but have God's gift of eternal life instead.

So, God didn't send his Son into the world to condemn everyone but to save people from condemnation through faith in him. We need to tell as many people as we can that God loves them and wants to be their Father, eyes and ears need to be opened in Jesus name.

GOD IS LOVE: He doesn't punish us when we approach him in confession. He does discipline us when we need it, but only so we can find out what is best for our lives. He knows what's best for us and when we stay in line with his commands and his word, we remain protected, safe and secure that whatever may happen he will never leave us or forsake us. Life happens, we can't do anything about that but we can walk through our life in his hands.

Love is the nature of God, it is not an emotional love, it is a love that is shown in positive action. God's love (agape) is expressed in the ways he gives to his people. He has shown his unfailing love for all mankind in sending his Son to die on the cross for them, for us, for you personally. Taking the punishment meant for us, we deserve to be punished but because of Jesus we are not, not ever.

His Holy Spirit in our lives is proof of that love – the love our heavenly Father has for his children. In 1 John 3.1, (my favourite verse in the Truth Version of the New Testament) "The love the Father has lavished on us is so great it cannot be put into words adequately, what a wonder it is that we should be called God's children and that is precisely what he has made us. The world does not understand this because those who belong to the world do not know him, therefore they cannot recognise us for what we are by his grace."

I pray that we will all be able to say we are God's children and we know he loves us. Ann is coming to read "God's love letter." Please close your eyes and let these words sink into your very being.

Remember there is always a place for prayer afterwards in the chapel.
Thank you, Ann.

(The Father's Love Letter can be found on YouTube).