

Sermon

Love is..

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Athelstone Uniting Church #54

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Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Pray

Please pray with me:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Introduce symbol of a heart. Throw my red heart squishy thing out into congregation to hand around and squeeze!

Recap

I'd like to begin by recapping last week's message

We've been reading Paul's first letter to the Corinthians

Image of the body

- Like the convoy in the TDU
- There are much more than bicycles to make a Tour Down Under!
- Each of the support vehicles, doctors, police, officials, and so on are an important component of the race
- Each have their own unique role, with their own unique gifts
- like the body metaphor that Paul uses
- A healthy body has every part in it performing its own function for the good of the whole. Each is allotted different gifts for differing functions.

- Every one of those gifts, a gift of the same Spirit – not for the good of the individual – but for the good of the whole body.
- These gifts – charismata – are given according to grace – God’s free gift to us. A free gift that springs from the creative grace of God to enable the members of the body to work together to do the work of the body.

Athelstone

Sue Ellis, our Moderator, has designated 2019 as the Year of Flourishing for the Uniting Church in South Australia. To flourish is to grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly congenial environment.

In this year of flourishing my prayer for us is that together we will continue to discern the unique gifts that the Spirit has given each of us – members of the body of Christ. I pray that we will continue to discern how God is calling us to use those gifts in this next season of ministry here in 2019, so that our congregation and our community will flourish!

The ampersand (here) represents how we do this together: you & me & everyone else...

Individuals brought together in community with one another.

We believe God cares for us & we are to care for each other.

God calls us all together, to build each other up, to serve each other in love.

Together we at Athelstone Uniting Church are the body of Christ, called to follow Jesus & join in his mission through our church.

Love

And that brings us to this week..

To the reading so often chosen for weddings – all about love

Love is patient, love is kind... it is so familiar!

The first thing I want to do is highlight the last line of the chapter before hand..

Paul ends chapter 12 by saying: "And yet I will show you the most excellent way."¹

This sentence can be read as a bridge from last week's reading about the body to this week's reading..

What is the most excellent way? To do everything out of love.

It's all about Love!

So, what is love?

We sing about it all the time:

Foreigner asked: I wanna know what love is

Captain and Tennille sang: Love will keep us together

The Beatles sang: All you need is love

Queen sang about that Crazy little thing called love

And Lionel Ritchie and Diana Ross sang about Endless love

Love is portrayed in movies too.. every Christmas it seems we now have a tradition of watching the movie Love Actually! Who watched it this Christmas?

The opening system shows people at the Arrivals area of an airport. Laughing and crying and hugging

It's a movie that follows a number of relationships – some romantic – some about the love between friends.

We were at the airport on Monday night – in the departure area - and there we saw something similar in real life – people hugging and crying and telling each other how loved they are..

What is love?

¹ 1 Cor 12:31b

A simple dictionary definition: an intense feeling of deep affection

What is love?

Martin Luther King Jr. Said:

"When I speak of love, I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response, I am speaking of that force which is ... the supreme unifying principle of life".

C.S. Lewis, said:

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable."

Mother Teresa said:

"I am not sure exactly what heaven will be like, but I know that when we die and it comes time for God to judge us, he will not ask, 'How many good things have you done in your life?' rather he will ask, 'How much love did you put into what you did?'"

What is love?

Love is.. agape

In English, we have one word for love that encompasses many feelings and behaviours. We love our friends, we love food, we love listening to music.

In Biblical Greek - the language of the New Testament - there are four words for love.

Perhaps you have heard of Phileo², Agape, Storge³, and Eros⁴?

² Companionable love

³ Affection

⁴ Erotic or passionate love

In this particular passage about love, Paul uses the word agape -

Agape is the most frequently used word for love in the New Testament. Paul uses it 9 times here.

It is the love that serves regardless of changing circumstances.

It is unconditional love.

It's loving someone that you know you will get nothing back from.

It is a love that is interested in putting others first

A sacrificial love

It is the love that God has for us,

encompassed by Matthew 22:39-40: Love your neighbour

And John 13:34: love one another

And

Matt 5:44: love your enemy

When we think of love, we jump often to romantic love. In the Bible, agape, the word most often used is nothing to do with romantic love. It is far more a choice or a position than a feeling. This agape love may well be present within romantic love, but is not limited to - or encompassed by - romantic love.

Rather, the love that the Bible speaks of far more closely resonates with the love exemplified by Jesus in his death on a cross. He died because he loved us - willing to give himself for the sake of us, with no promise of reward for himself.

Jesus is agape.

Love is demonstrated in Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection

He was loved by and loves the Father

He connected his followers to his Father's love

what is love?

Love is ... interdependent

Love is ... interdependent

Not dependent, not independent, not codependent – but interdependent – a mutual love.

God the Trinity – 3 in 1 – models this kind of love

3 persons of the Trinity – each with individual characteristics – each interdependent on each other - the one body – the one God

Pastor Wayne Cordeiro, in his book, *Doing Church As A Team*, says:

“May we learn God’s design for His people and begin to respect and appreciate each other’s giftings. There are few things more beautiful to God than seeing His people serving and working together in a unified rhythm. It’s like a symphony to His ears. That’s how we were created to function. God has designed us to need each other! For us to reach our communities, much less the world, we will need every ministry doing its part and every member of the congregation excitedly doing church as a team.” This is called “Interdependence”. Webster defines “Interdependence” as “a relationship in which each member is mutually dependent on the others”. The Apostle Paul basically says the same thing in Romans 12:4-5: “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”⁵

So agape is reflected in the interpersonal relationship with others in the body

It’s a love represented by interdependent relationships:

When we are interdependent we are prepared to ask people for help and to help people when they need us. We open ourselves up to others and allow others to open themselves up to us. We walk through life together rather than on our own. We learn

⁵ Quoted from an article here: <http://jesussavesnetwork.org/index.php/blog/post/the-power-of-interdependence>

from each other, we encourage each other, we support each other, we care for each other, we have fun together, we build memories together and we help each other to grow. We realise we are stronger and better as two or more than we are on our own.⁶

what is love?

Love is...

Choosing to put into practice agape love

Choosing to serve with joy

Choosing to put aside irritations about one another's behaviour and love them anyway

Love is..

Choosing to be part of the body, to reveal more of who you are and trust others

Choosing to give sacrificially in all kinds of ways

Love is

Choosing to be open to the leading of the Spirit

Choosing to take on the characteristics of Jesus and become more and more like him every day

This week, I invite you to reflect on love, the kind of love that Paul is talking about

Give thanks for the love that God has shown you through his Son, through people in your life, through members of this part of the body

Reflect on how you show love for others

Pray about ways that God might be asking you to open up more to others and show agape love with no expectation of anything in return.

Pray about how we as a church can show agape love to our community and to our world, using the gifts God has given us through the Spirit.

⁶ <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/why-do-we-prefer-independence-over-interdependence-its-making-us-all-sad/40321.htm>

Here's a beautiful prayer written by John van de Laar.

How deeply you have loved us, Jesus;
how willingly you stepped into our experience,
how completely you empathised with all that we endure.

How sacrificially you have loved us, Jesus;
how completely you gave yourself for us,
how courageously you suffered for our sakes.

How restoratively you have loved us, Jesus;
how generously you share your life,
how extravagantly you make yourself available to us.

Teach us to love as you have loved us.

We praise you for your love
which is given so freely and so unconditionally.

And we thank you for believing
that we could learn to offer such love
to each other.

Amen.⁷

⁷ — written by John van de Laar, and posted on his Sacredise website.