

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 5th May 2024
The Sixth Sunday
of Easter
The Revd Andy Braunston

What's Love Got To Do With It?

Introduction

Today we ponder today what love is and what it has to do with our faith. Our culture, built on the values of the Bible, sees love as a positive virtue but gets confused on what exactly love is. We'll explore that a little in word and song, movement, and music, and in bread and wine as we're swept up into the loving presence of God as we gather around His table. Love is a universal human emotion; we know what we mean when we say we're in love with someone, or that we love someone, or that this or that church shows love to others. We mean love to mean our romantic and erotic emotions, the bonds that come within families, and the acts of our will that are informed by our faith and values. Love is what we sing about in our culture and read about in our Bibles. Love is what the world thinks is enough, yet it often is confused about love; we say we fall out of love – when we're probably just moving on from infatuation. We confuse, even within our faith, love as an emotion and love as an act of our will.

Call To Worship

Christ has risen, alleluia! **He has risen indeed, alleluia!**
Our help is in the name of the Lord **who made heaven and earth.**

Prayers of Approach & Confession, Assurance of Forgiveness

We awake this day, O God, to sing your praises.
We are enlivened by your presence and made attentive to your love.
We awoke with the knowledge of your commandments in our hearts,
and we bring you our praise.

With nature we are awakened with your hope of a world reborn;
with all who grieve we embrace your comfort as we rub the sleep from our eyes.
We awoke with the knowledge of the joy you bring to those who grieve
and we bring you our praise.

We awake this day O God with the knowledge that you warm our wintry hearts,
that the light of your love awakens our desire to obey you,

and we are awoken with the life that springs like fire from the cold tomb,
and we bring you are praise.

Even in our joy, O God, we realise that we may still prefer not to wake up;
our dull heads ignore our sin,
our sleepy hearts prefer not to think of our responsibilities,
and we would rather not be awoken with the challenges your love brings.

Forgive us, O God, that we may awaken to your love,
be alert to your commandments, and faithful to your call to change. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Let each of us, in the knowledge of both our sinfulness
and our creation in God's own glorious image,
humble ourselves before God
and believe that the ever-gracious Creator
wills us to know we are loved.

All of us who look to Jesus for our salvation
will find it and, through the Church, find their sins are forgiven,
in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Adapted from Calvin's Strasbourg Liturgy 1545.

Prayer for Illumination

Jesus, lover of our souls,
we have no other refuge but you,
all our trust is placed in you,
so now, as you are read and proclaimed,
open our hearts to hear, our minds to obey
and our wills to conform to your will,
our rock and redeemer, Amen.

Readings

1 John 5:1-6 | St John 15:9-17

All Age Activities

There are lots of good ideas about all age activities around love here

https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1638/09/Families_on_Faith_Adventures_-_Week_34_-_Love_isSo_What.pdf

Sermon Notes

Play Tina Turner's *What's Love Got To Do With It* either now or at the start of the service. If you don't do this don't spend too much time exploring the song which I do in the notes!

Introduction

Love is a word that can mean many different things; it's a word used in our wider culture in ways which may be a little different to the ways in which the Biblical authors used it. This is partly due to English only having one word "love" to mean romantic interest, erotic desire, family bonds and service of others – what used to be described as charity. Love, they say, makes the world go round. The Beatles held that all we needed was love and Tina Turner wondered what love, that second hand emotion, had to do with physical attraction. Our readings today muse on love – but the love they describe may not be the same as what we might mean by it now. A spinning, second hand emotion, might not be what the Biblical authors had in mind.

What's Love Got To Do With it?

Graham Lyle and Terry Britten wrote the song *What's Love Got to Do With it* and offered it to Cliff Richard who rejected it. The British pop group Buck's Fizz were also offered it and recorded a demo tape but were told by a producer the sound was wrong for a female lead! Tina Turner achieved world-wide success with the song selling over 2 million copies and being, then, the oldest solo woman artist to hit the top 100. The song has been covered by other artists and became the soundtrack to the film of the same name telling Tina Turner's life story. In the song the poets try to say that the physical feelings of attraction are nothing to do with love, but as the song goes on we realise that the poets protest a bit too much and that the rejection of the love label is about protection and not wanting to be hurt "I've been thinking about my own protection, it scares me to feel this way" and "who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?" So maybe these feelings had something to do with love after all.

Love and Culture

Love, we think, is a universal human emotion and one that links us with other cultures and times. And yet what love might mean in any given culture or time is different. Historian Tom Holland's *Dominion* explores the history and impact of Christianity from Jesus' crucifixion to the Beetle's "All you Need is Love." Holland argues that all our moral and social norms are the product of the Christian revolution in the ancient world. Jesus' teaching and Paul's maxim that God chose the weak and foolish to shame the strong drive home the point that our cultural values, 2,000 years after Christ, are based on Jesus' teaching and ideas about love. Holland points out that the Christian idea of love is nothing to do with romance, eroticism, or even of the emotions – important though those things are. Instead, Holland points out love in the New Testament is a social practice not a sentiment. It's not a feeling it's an act of the will. The love that Christ taught is a love that

is ruthlessly impersonal; it doesn't care about age, gender, race, sex, class or wealth; it's about who needs our help. It's the idea that this type of love will counter the powers that seek to rule our world. It's the idea that this is the love that drove Jesus to the Cross and raised him from the dead. It's this love which is subversive. It's this love that the writers of today's readings wrote about.

1 John

For the writer of 1 John loving God is seen not in feelings but in obeying God's commandments – which are not burdensome - and God's commandments in Scripture are most often about loving others. We are, after all, to love our neighbours as ourselves. Holland would say this is a radical departure, in the Judaeo Christian tradition, from any other faith or philosophy in the ancient world. Loving others with no thought of reward was an alien concept in the ancient world and made Christians, and Jews, seem very odd indeed.

In 1966 Peter Scholtes, a white priest who had volunteered to lead St Brendan's Parish in Chicago wrote the hymn *We Are One in the Spirit* which posited the view that evangelism should be based on the idea of our acts of love and service. St Brendan's was a mixed Irish and black parish in south Chicago. Fr Scholtes weathered protests by white parishioners when he hung signs on his church welcoming Martin Luther King to Chicago. He showed Dr King around and had the workers in his parish basement show him how they fed and cared for those who lived in the area. Fr Scholtes grieved when white folk left his neighbourhood for more affluent, and whiter, suburbs and tried to encapsulate in his ministry what the author of 1 John was describing – loving God by loving others. The writer reminds us that God's commandments are not burdensome – it's important to remember that, especially if we're part of social groups which have often been expected to show love through serving; women, black people, lgbt people, the poor are often expected to serve and stay in the background. That hymn reminds us of mutuality; we'll walk hand in hand, work side by side and spread the news that God is in our land. The love we read of in 1 John inspires us to evangelise through service, to love even those we don't like and to remember that it is in loving service that we show our faith in God.

John

The snippet from John's Gospel has the same theme – love. God's love of us and our love of God seen in how we show love to others. This isn't the dreamy love of a first date, it's not the eroticism of lovers, it's not even the love we have for those in our family – it's a love we're driven to as we seek to serve and care for others. It's a love that is disinterested in its own reward, a love that seeks another's good, a love that inconveniences us; it's this love which changes the world.

This is love which tells the truth to those in power;

- a love that tells Mr Putin his lies, greed and subversion of the Gospel must be answered.
- a love which tells Mr Trump that it's better to read rather than sell Bibles, that truth will set him free but will hurt him first, and that attacking those he perceives as weak will end only in hatred.
- a love that tells our politicians to seek the common good; to look for long term prosperity for all not short-term gains at the polls.
- a love which donates and volunteers in food banks
- a love which works with the homeless to help restore dignity, trust, and help.
- a love where white people tell the truth about our past and the legacies of slavery which are all around us. All over Britain money from slavery flowed; allowing ancient houses to be repaired, lands to be purchased and improved, charitable donations and endowments made to ease, no doubt, troubled consciences. This is tough love and requires bravery, openness, and a willingness to make reparations to those whose lives, even now, are blighted by these poisonous legacies.

Drawing Threads Together

The love Jesus proclaimed was not about the physical sensations that Tina Turner sang about, it's not about what we want to do, it's not about our desires. This love is an act of our will; a way of showing our faith in action. If we say we love God but don't love God's people then we're kidding ourselves. This is love that bears fruit, that brings joy and, ultimately, sets us free.

Affirmation of Faith

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love; **everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another; **everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. So, we have known and believe the love that God has for us; **everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a sibling whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have is this: those who love God must love their siblings also; **everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

From 1 John 4: 7 - 21

Intercessions

O God, Eternal Majesty, hear us now as we pray for our world.
We pray for places and people in need of your love,
for those who worship in secret this day for fear of the authorities,
for those whose praise of your name endangers their lives,
and for those persecuted for how they love and live.
Give them strength, O God,
that your love will encourage and strengthen life and faith.

O God, Risen Lord Jesus, hear us now as we pray for your people,
We pray for those people and places in need of your shelter,
for those hiding from bombs and raids,
for those living with chronic pain,
and for those whose life ebbs to its close.
Give them your love, Lord Jesus,
that your grace will encourage and strengthen life and faith.

O God, Fiery Spirit, hear us now as we pray for your inspiration,
that the power of your change will make a difference.
We pray for those who love evil, who prefer the dark to the light,
and who hate your love, that you pursue them with the light of faith,
and give them time to hate their sins more than they hate others,
that they may find the grace to turn to you,
so that your people might flourish.

O God, Eternal Trinity, we bring before you now,
in the silence of our hearts,
those whom we love and worry about.

Silence

Accept all our prayers, O God,
that through your love working in our lives
Your Kingdom may come and so we pray as Jesus taught saying,
Our Father...

Offertory

We have thought today about love – the love God has for us, the types of love we have and the love that we're commanded to express in our readings; a love that is not an emotion or a physical response but an act of our will. This love seeks the good of others – those we've seen and those we'll never meet. We exercise this love in many ways – through charities, through donations to the foodbank, to volunteering for charities and, of

course, through our financial offerings which support God's work across our world and our nations. So, let's express love through our giving.

O God, your love is the essence of all that we love here,
all the beauty of the world,
all the kindness of strangers,
all the silent strength of love
is an expression of your great love.
Bless these gifts of love,
that we may use them wisely,
always reflecting the love you have for us. Amen.

Holy Communion

May God be with you: **and also with you.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to God.**
Let us give thanks to our gracious God: **it is right to give thanks and praise.**

Living God, out of chaos and darkness
your creative word called light into being and life in all its fulness.
Though in the garden we chose to disobey you
and death entered our world
you are the bringer of life from the places of death.
You saved Noah and his family from the Flood
and passed over the children of Israel
when death struck the firstborn of Egypt.
You led your people out
from slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon.
You saved Jonah from the belly of the whale
and Daniel from the lions' den.
By your power Sarah and Hannah brought forth sons
and Ruth the stranger became the mother of kings.

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!
Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendour!
Christ has conquered! Jesus Christ our King is risen!
Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes for ever!
Rejoice, O Mother Church!
The risen Saviour shines upon you!
Let this place resound with joy,
echoing the mighty song of all God's people!

Therefore with all your people in heaven and on earth
we sing the triumphant hymn of your glory:

Skye Boat Song Sanctus

Michael Forster © 1995, 1999 Kevin Mayhew Ltd.

**Holy, most holy, all holy the Lord,
God of all pow'r and might,
heaven and earth with your glory abound,
wrapped in eternal light.
Blessed is he, he who has come,
Come in the Father's name,
Servant and Lord, Saviour and Judge,
Making his royal claim.
Holy, most holy, all holy the Lord,
God of all pow'r and might,
Now with hosannas and jubilant praise
Earth and the heav'ns unite.**

Born on a dark night,
during his life on earth the light of your Son's presence
brought hope to the lost and healing to the sick.
He preached good news to the poor and ate with sinners.
For this he was pursued to the death.

For this, the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed
took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said:

'This is my body which is broken for you. Do this is remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup also after supper, saying:

'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.
For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.'

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

We praise you that the darkness could not hold him
for he was raised at dawn to bring new life to the world.
**By his power sin is purged, innocence restored to the fallen,
joy to the mourners; hatred is vanquished, tyranny laid low;
harmony reigns, heaven and earth are united
and humanity is reconciled with God.
The Morning Star has risen, never again to set.**

His light is become our light; his Spirit is ours;
may our lives shine with the radiance of his glory
and this bread and wine, which His Spirit has blessed,
lift us into his presence and lead us to the feasting of the Kingdom,
where we shall be raised up to see him face to face,
in the glory of the blessed Trinity, through all ages. **Amen.**

*Slightly adapted from Colin Thompson's prayer in
Worship From: Additional Resources*

To prepare ourselves to meet the Lord in Holy Communion we sing the Lamb of God.

O Lamb of God (Our God Loves Us)

John Ballantine © 1976, 1996 Kevin Mayhew Ltd

O Lamb of God,
you take away our sins;
have mercy, Lamb of God,
have mercy. (repeat)

O Lamb of God,
you take away our sins;
have mercy, Lamb of God,
and grant us peace.

Post Communion Prayer

Bless the Lord, O my soul;
and all that is within me, bless God's holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, **and forget not all God's benefits.**

Loving God, we thank you that you have
fed us in this sacrament, united us with Christ,
and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in your eternal realm.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Worship Westminster John Knox Press 1993 p76

Blessing

May the One who loved you before the ages began,
the One who taught you how to live and love,
and the One who inspires you to love even those you don't like,
bless you to love, live, and act
that the world may know it is loved and held in the palm of God's hand.
And the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Be with you all, now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Earth, Earth awake; your praises sing: alleluia! (also goes to Jesus Christ is Risen Today)		420		
Jesus Lover of My Soul	332	490	355	372
Sing A New Song to the Lord (Psalm 98)		62		599
Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing	260	416	297	
O The Love of My Lord Is The Essence			431	
Our Lord Christ Is Risen The Tempter is Foiled		421		
The King of Love My Shepherd Is	552	462	479	649
Love Divine All Loves Excelling	663	519	503	449
Love Is His Word, Love is His Way				
Love is the touch of intangible joy		518		

Other Suggestions...

We Are One in the Spirit is well known but missing from most hymnbooks! This version https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL5bT_Ezeq8 is the one used in the DD Sunday Service and uses some updated lyrics which avoid the gender specific ones in Fr Scholtes' original.

Why not play Tina Turner singing *What's Love Got To Do With It?* at the start of worship and the Beatles' *All You Need is Love* at the end?

A neglected part of our tradition is to sing the *Holy, Holy, Holy* and *Lamb of God*. Today's suggestions come from *Tunes We Know* published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd using the *Skye Boat Song* for the Sanctus and the hymn *Our God Loves Us* for the Agnus Dei. It's more fun to sing than say these responses, leads to a greater celebrative feel and involves the congregation in the Communion prayer rather well.