

## Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2024

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Readings 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 ([Good News](#))  
Mark 1:21-28 ([New Living Translation](#))

Reflection

Song – [All you need is love.](#)

Our reading from 1 Corinthians is all about love, Paul explores the loving things to do in a difficult situation and it involves putting the needs of the other person first. In the English language we have one word – LOVE, but in the Greek of the early church there were many words translated as love, each word depicting a different facet of love

ἔρως (eros) was used for the love between those in a relationship,

στέργηθρον (stergethron) was used for a parent's love for their child

φιλία (philia) was used for a brotherly love or friendship

Later, mainly in the New Testament, ἀγάπη (agape) came to denote something we might call spiritual love or the love that Jesus meant when he called his followers to love one another.

Paul is exploring what it means to love one another and is doing so in response to something which is happening in the early church. He recognises a number of things, we all grow in faith and understanding at different rates, knowing something does not always ensure a good action, love means putting the needs of others before your own needs.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer also explored the nature of the love Jesus called us to, comparing spiritual love with what he called human love to make his point. Recognising the unconditional nature of God's love compared to the limiting nature of human love which often imposes conditions, albeit unconsciously, he drew out some helpful comparisons .

- Human love is often about seeking out those we have something in common with, where Spiritual love is about loving others regardless, simply because we are called to love everyone whether we like them or not, we may have nothing in common other than our humanity.
- Human love can be about satisfying a need in ourselves where there is nothing of self in spiritual love.
- Human love can imprison others, we get jealous and want the person all for ourselves there can be a force about human love. Spiritual love is the opposite it is about freedom, encouragement and doing something to enable growth in the other.
- Human love often want a person to change into the person we want them to be. Spiritual love accepts people the way God has made them and the way God might want them to be.
- Human love serves, but often expects a return, Spiritual love serves.

Our love for God is symbolised by how we choose to love others. How do you show someone that you love them? It is about more than words although the creative use of

words can be a message of love. I once heard a story of an elderly couple who throughout their life together played a game of hiding the letters SHMILY in as many different places as they could find. When one found the hidden word it was their turn to hide it – it was written in the sugar, the flour, in the condensation on a window, taped to a steering wheel, stuffed inside shoes, left under pillows, written in the ash in fireplace and even on the cardboard tube in the middle of the toilet roll. What did the letters mean - See how much I love you. Although a deep expression of eros, never the less it was still not spiritual love in the sense of agape.

Jesus loved people, he wanted the best for them, the fullness of humanity, which is why he freed the man from whatever was holding him captive. Such actions often did not make him popular, but whilst it caused ripples in certain places in his time, it would not make the headlines today however it will still make a difference. The sort of love that Jesus demonstrated would change the world. Love that is about freedom and building up people is so different from the ego driven puffed up love to which Paul was referring in 1 Corinthians. There is a power to spiritual love that has nothing to do with power over others. Twenty years ago I came across an article entitled Love is the killer approach, it later became a very successful business book entitled Love is the killer App. It was written by Tim Sanders then senior executive with Yahoo and he outlined how the road to prosperity is paved with a commitment to generosity. Writing not long after the terrorist attacks of 2001 he talked about the power of love, using a definition from Milton Mayerhoff as 'love being the selfless promotion of the growth of the other'. When you help others grow to become the best people that they can be, you are being loving -- and as a result, you yourself grow. Adapting this for the business world he came up with 'Love is the act of intelligently and sensibly sharing your knowledge, networks, and compassion with your business partners. The less you expect in return for acts of professional generosity, the more you will receive.'

All around him companies were closing in the wake of 9/11 and he suggested that love will make things better – it did and it does. The more you know the more you have to share. Where many see knowledge as power over others, Sanders suggest knowledge is power for all when it is shared but that needs a network of people with whom to share and an understanding that compassion for the people in that network means that your success is directly linked to their success. There is interdependence in a successful world, exactly as Jesus said and demonstrated. Over the last twenty years, Sanders as a consultant, has rescued thousands of companies from the oblivion of a power infused structure where fear drives people out. He promotes a change in culture recognising a shared mission and shared values – trust in each other, commitment to each other, love for each other, empowerment of each other – family values if you like, and also that every person is employed to think and learn and share. This strategy has revolutionary effect on business and isn't that the same as the message of Jesus.

Jesus did not grab power, he used his knowledge to help others. Jesus did not seek power but used knowledge by sharing it with others so we could all come to know a relationship with God. Paul as Saul, grabbed power and used to destroy until he saw the light and realised the power of love as a tool for change, as a tool for growth and a tool for the prosperity of all.

We often talk of catching glimpses of God in the world around us, glimpses of God's love in our daily lives. There are love letters all around – the beauty of nature, the kindness of a stranger, a shared smile across a room. How committed are we to showing how much we love God?

How can we be a glimpse of God's love for other people? A card to a lonely friend, an unexpected phone call to a family member of acquaintance, a postcard of protest to the government, a jumper knitted for someone in Africa, shopping bought for a neighbour the list is endless. What could we do together as church? Our mission is to share love and part of that is sharing our knowledge of God.

What have you done for love? (Milk tray ad, miss the last bus home, give up football, fishing, golf, a career, independence, move away from family and friends)

So what would we do for God - Love our neighbour, Give up a comfy lifestyle, Move away, perhaps to the other side of the world, Become poor, have no other God's.

What message do we give our children about love – a worldly message or God's message. Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.' He knew the power of such love, are we ready to be love in the world?

Watch an excerpt from a Tim Saunders talk [here](#)