

A Reflection from Revd Ali for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

All You Need is Love – it's OK, I'm not going to start singing the famous Beatles anthem. But today's readings are all about love. Such a short word, those 4 small letters, when arranged in that order, can mean so many things.

Firstly, there is romantic love. If we are fortunate enough to find it, romantic love is something that really enriches our lives, and if it wasn't important to us as a species, then it certainly wouldn't enrich song writers and composers! I am sure that you could all think of many famous songs or pieces of music that have been inspired by or celebrate romantic love. Perhaps you have a favourite? Or one that means something special to you? Music can be so emotive and can communicate emotions that we find difficult to articulate. I think that is why we are missing singing in church so much. There is such joy to be found in expressing our love for God through our hymns and worship songs.

Then there is the love that is shared in families. Between parents and children, siblings, grandparents and wider members of the family. Again, if we are fortunate, familial love is something that supports and nurtures us throughout our lives. There is something unconditional about familial love. It is the love that is shared when those who are closest to you, still love you, even though they know you 'warts and all'.

Unfortunately, not everyone is blessed with familial love. That's when the next type of love is so important. The love that is shared between friends. I am sure we all have those friends that I call my '2am friends'. You know, the friend that if you telephoned them at 2am, their first reaction wouldn't be 'do you know what time it is?' but rather 'what can I do'. That friendship-love that very often lasts a lifetime and has sold many a fridge magnet declaring that 'friends are the family we choose for ourselves'.

Then there is love for our community. That love is often expressed in service. And I am sure you can think of many examples of people, who during the pandemic, have demonstrated love for their communities by going above and beyond for their neighbours.

And we mustn't forget love for creation. Caring for this wonderful planet that we call home, is something that has really come into focus for many of us. The realisation that God's gift of planet earth also comes with the responsibility to care for it and steward the earth's resources wisely and equitably.

I am sure you can think of other types of love too. In fact, if we listed every kind of love that we could think of, we would probably be here all morning. So, you would think, that as we experience so many types of love in our lives, then understanding and following God's commandments to love each other would be easy.

In our reading from John's Gospel (John 15: 9-17) Jesus tries to explain the concept in a really simple way. Living life in all its fullness just involves loving God and loving each other. If we love God then we keep God's commandments. Those 10 'best ways to live' that Moses brought down the mountain to the people of God. Simple instructions that have been complicated into sets of rules and regulations, behaviours and habits. As children of God we shouldn't find it hard to follow God's commandments. If we remain in Christ, we remain in Christ's love and through the love of Christ we can overcome the world. The world that tries to influence us to contain our love, subvert, or even at times pervert our love for self and others.

Before Jesus, if God's people were in any doubt what to do in any given situation, then they would turn to the law. Especially those 10 best ways to live. But over time, people had overcomplicated the laws which God wanted them to live by. The simple message of the 10 best ways was expanded into over 600 rules and regulations requiring legal experts to interpret and give

judgement. The law itself became the be all and end all. In some cases, legalism overtook faith. Human interpretation overtook God's will for God's people.

Fortunately, Christ simplified everything for us by defining the essence of the law and the commandments. He tells us how to live life in simple terms, so that we can all remember and understand. We simply need to love God and Love one another as Christ has loved us. It is easy, it is straightforward, as Jesus tells us in verse 10 (John 15:10) 'if you keep my commands you will remain in my love'.

At first glance, we might think that the 'if' in that verse means that there is a conditional element to God's love. That remaining in God's love means we must 'get it right'. But God, through the person of Jesus Christ, knows what it is like to be human. God, through Jesus Christ, understands that we try and sometimes fail. But God's grace and unconditional love is so great for each one of us, that when we realise that we have got things wrong and say sorry, God forgives us. It is in that forgiveness that there is strength to try again. The great gift of having a new day, to say that 'today is the day that I am going to love God and love others', despite how badly I got it wrong yesterday. God's unconditional love gives us life in a way that is so much greater than anything we could possibly earn or deserve.

Jesus' reminds us (John 15: 12) to 'love one another as I have loved you'. Jesus doesn't just want us to love him, but to act as people of love in the world. To be inspired by his example. To understand how great Jesus' love is for us, so we can love one another. Jesus' love was sacrificial, he laid down his life for all of us. He tells us in verse 13 and 14 that 'greater love has no one than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends'. By laying down his life on the cross Jesus showed the depth of his love for us. His sacrifice inspires us to love others sacrificially and wholeheartedly. To be ready to give of ourselves for the other. That isn't to say that we are to be doormats. Jesus isn't saying that we should allow ourselves to be used and abused. But instead, to be open to, and aware of, the needs of others. To give without expectation of reciprocity.

Jesus' love for us was a sharing love. Jesus shared with his disciples, and us, all that he had learnt from the Father. If we are to love one another as Jesus has loved us, then we too have to share what we have received and believe about God's love. It isn't something to keep to ourselves. Jesus tells us to go and make disciples of all the nations (a daunting task if ever I heard one!), but Jesus is asking us to just start with one person at a time. To share our love of God through our lives and our actions. And as St Francis is reported to have said 'to preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary, use words'. We aren't all called to stand here at the front, but we are all called to share the Gospel, and the Gospel is a book of love.

Jesus' love was a sending love. Jesus called the disciples, taught and equipped them, and then sent them out into the world to share his message of love and hope. Jesus calls us all to do the same. Fortunately, we don't have to do it in our own strength, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are all anointed to bear fruit and to be witnesses to Jesus' love and to live out our lives in love for God and each other. So maybe the Beatles did get it right – all you really do need, is love.

Amen.