

FROM THE MANSE

Dear Friends,

During the service on Sunday, 13th of September, the Sacrament of Holy Communion will be celebrated. You may therefore wish to have a piece of bread and a small glass of wine or fruit juice prepared before the service in order that you can participate in the Sacrament. All who love the Lord are welcome at his table.

In normal times, in September, we have as a congregation given money to support the work of WaterAid. Due to the pandemic we have decided not to distribute envelopes but the Kirk Session would encourage you to donate online via WaterAid's website or to send a cheque. The Postal address can be found on our Church website. By supporting WaterAid we can help transform the lives of some of the world's poorest and most marginalised people by improving access to clean water, toilets and hygiene. This year, WaterAid needs our support more than ever. Be assured that whatever you give will make a difference.

St Paul was clearly a gifted man. As well as being a theologian, an author and a preacher, he was also a poet. We have just read his poem in praise of love. The rhythm and balance of his phrases, the power of his words, and the majesty and wonder of the concepts he describes have stirred and challenged people's hearts down through the years.

Professor Henry Drummond was born in Stirling on the 17th of August 1851. He was a writer, lecturer and evangelist who wrote a book called 'The Greatest Thing in the World.' To this day it remains popular in Christian circles. The substance of the book I believe was an address given to students of Edinburgh University, based on the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians. In his address, Drummond put forward his view that Christian love is the ultimate secret of life and the greatest thing in the world.

St Paul had clearly grasped this for at the beginning of his poem he exalts love to the highest level by stating that without it, all other gifts are meaningless. He then lists some of those gifts, gifts which were coveted by some in the Christian community in Corinth and which had regrettably caused friction within the community; eloquence, prophesy and self-sacrifice.

In effect, Paul states *'If I have all these and yet have not love, I gain nothing.'*

'Love changes everything' is a song from the musical *'Aspects of Love'* by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Michael Ball sings it well!

It is a fine song but more than that, its opening words inadvertently proclaim a great Biblical truth, a truth our Lord highlighted when he was asked *'What is the greatest commandment?'* and he answered *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And the second is like it; love your neighbour as you love yourself.'*

But what is this love, of which our Lord spoke and St Paul wrote? Thankfully, he gives us a beautiful description of it;

'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.' And hear this *'Love never fails'*.

Can I put it to you that these words from a portrait of none other than Jesus himself? In him, we see exemplified the qualities Paul sets out for us. He went about doing good, he healed the sick, he fed the hungry, he comforted the sad, he challenged those who were unkind and offered people the opportunity to begin again and he did it all because of love, love was what motivated him and on the cross we see the greatest act of love in the history of humanity, when in agony he asked his father to forgive those who had brought about his crucifixion.

There are many ways by which people endeavour to measure their value in life. Some measure it according to what they have achieved, some measure it by their level of intelligence, some measure it by the gifts they possess or the impressiveness of their speech. St Paul gives us a different measure – the measure of love. Love, he says is the true measure of all that we say, all that we have and all that we do. Without love even our best accomplishments are nothing in God's eyes.

In 1941 an Auschwitz deputy commander ordered that ten men be starved to death in retribution after three inmates were believed to have escaped. Upon hearing that he was sentenced to die, a sergeant in the Polish army and father of two burst into tears, prompting Maximilian Kolbe, a catholic Priest from Poland to approach the commander saying *'I would like to take his place because he has a wife and children'*. The Priest's offer was accepted and he went to Auschwitz's notorious starvation bunker with the nine other inmates, whom remarkably he tried to console. And it was there he died.

Such a selfless act cannot but move us but more than that it should inspire **us** to be selfless and while that will not normally require us to give up our life, it does mean that following the teaching of our Lord, we will, day in and day out, endeavour as best we can to put others before ourselves

During this pandemic many have spoken of simple acts of kindness. Neighbours looking out for one another, people calling on elderly folk living on their own to make sure they are okay, baking left on the doorstep, a card or flower just to let someone know they are not forgotten. Such selfless acts have made a difference and wouldn't it be good if they continued after the pandemic has passed?

For those of us who follow Jesus, the way of love is paramount. To be clear we do not have an option to love or not to love. Love is integral to our calling, it is to be lived out in our daily life and it is to be seen in our relationships with one another.

Professor Henry Drummond was surely right in what he said. Love is the ultimate secret of life. It is the greatest thing in the world.

'And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'

Every blessing,

Your Friend and Minister,

Gary J McIntyre