

Luke 1:39-56

Psalm 33

Love

Jane Ward-Hall, 12/12/21

*Over the years I have grown in respect for Mary as a woman totally surrendered to the will of God. Young Mary was probably doing chores for her mother, when the angel appears. She is terrified, I think she would have been shocked to the core terrified, well I would have been anyway! The angel tells her she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. All very alarming considering she's an unmarried teenage girl. How amazing that a few weeks later she is able to sing this marvellous song of praise to God in response to the greeting of her cousin Elizabeth.*

*Both of our readings this morning are songs of praise. Psalm 33 from the Jewish hymn book and, Mary's song, that we know as the Magnificat which is so important to the Church that it has been sung at Evensong for centuries.*

*Today our topic is love. What is love? Well, how long have you got? Universally we all need love. We all want it. We adapt in early childhood, responding to our care givers, trying to get more of it. Somehow, even as newborns, we intuit that love is what we need to grow and flourish.*

*As a church we say we desire to "be known by love". What would newcomers to Holy Trinity Sunningdale notice to enable them to say "that's a loving church"? A smile, a warm welcome, a friendly conversation, or something else?*

*I recently rewatched the film About a Boy. The main characters Hugh Grant, Will, selfish and wealthy, Marcus the geeky boy and his hippy mother. The mother walks the boy to school and insists he says he loves her right outside the gate, as Marcus tries to walk across the playground a chorus breaks out, from older, jeering boys, "Love you Marcus," mimicking the mother. During the course of the film things change so much that the closing scene is of a group of happy people sharing a Christmas meal. Could love have something to do with this?*

*I'm reminded that love is so much more than words. Saying "I love you" can just be empty words if it isn't backed up by action. Just a quick glance at the gospels shows us that Jesus doesn't go round telling people he loves them but He demonstrates love in His compassion, kindness and healing miracles. Jesus is Love in action.*

*When Terry and I were first going out he was able to say, after a relatively short period of time, that he loved me. I was wooed by dinners out, fresh flowers and chocolates! It was a wonderful time. My son said "Mum be careful you aren't seduced by this man's kindness". For a long time I agonised, questioning myself and my motives. Whilst I knew I loved Terry my concern was did I love him enough to marry him. Did I have enough love in me to sustain us through sickness, health and old age? One day while praying God finally managed to get through to me, helping me to see that I was thinking about this in completely the wrong way. It was God's love, not mine, that would sustain us and carry us through tough times. His love would never run out, there would always be more than enough if we kept turning to Him. God is the source of all love.*

*We think it's good to be independent, responsible, working things out for ourselves. That it's weak and shameful to ask for help and admit vulnerability. But is that the way God sees things? The Bible says His ways are not our ways. We often find the ways of God are not what we expect. The truth is it's acknowledging our vulnerability, our weakness and our inability to get things right that draws us deeper into relationship with God and with others. It is in relationship that we can really see love working and growing. Richard Rohr says "Love is like a living organism, an active force field upon which we can rely, from which we can draw, and which we can allow to pass through us".*

*Mary is a really good example of this. Surely it's love that transforms her from being a terrified young girl to being able to sing the Magnificat, full of joy and praise, on the day she meets Elizabeth. She is an example of the upside down Kingdom of God that Dolapo was telling us about a couple of weeks ago. Chosen by God to be the mother of His Son yet she is poor, unmarried and uneducated.*

*The words of the Magnificat show that Mary gets this. She recognises the upside down nature of God's Kingdom, that earthly rulers are brought down, that the humble are lifted, the hungry are filled with good things and the rich sent away empty. I take this to mean when we are hungry for God, for His love, and His Kingdom values we will be blessed.*

*God demonstrated His love in action to Mary and Elizabeth through their pregnancies. They realised how much God loved them. For us it will be different but it will be God's love that transforms us, not our efforts. The more we turn our attention to God and seek out His promises for our lives then we like Elizabeth can say "Blessed is she/he who has believed that the Lord would fulfil His promises to her/him". And as it says in Psalm 33 "May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you."*

*Amen.*