

Over the past six weeks we have been studying the famous passage on love from 1 Corinthians 13. It is read at a great many wedding and one could be forgiven for thinking it was written specifically about romantic love but it's not, far from it.

If we want something more romantic we look into the Song of Solomon which Harry and Megan had at their wedding.

The letter to the Corinthians was St. Paul's attempt to help the poor struggling church in Corinth sort itself out. They had got themselves into quite a mess...and they are not the last church to do so.

At the start of the chapter St. Paul chooses to use himself as an illustration to show that any service or action without love is an empty meaningless gesture, it gains nothing.

He sometimes looks at God's character (for God is love) and writes clearly about what love is like – patient, kind. Quite a few of us have picked that up as a mantra repeating it to ourselves when in trying situations.

And then St. Paul looks at the Corinthians and explains what love is not. One can almost imagine him picturing particular people and problems.

Love is not envious (which you are being)
Love isn't boastful (like you know who)
Love isn't rude or shameful (and quite a few have let the side down there)

Then he gets to some foundational ideas about love, how it bears all things and believes all things hopes all things and endures all things.

We start to see that this passage, eloquent though it may be, is not fluffy love, feeble love or "Love Island" love – but robust, determined, committed and strong.

Last week we considered that love matures and deepens and develops leading ever further into understanding God's character, and reflecting his image in our own lives.

During our six weeks I spoke about a woman who asked me to conduct a little celebration for her 25 wedding anniversary and to bless new rings for her and her husband. Its not an unusual request, but for this couple the husband is now in Dormy (a local nursing home) and his dementia renders him incapable of responding or engaging. It was deeply moving to see the committed and tenacious love this lady had for her husband, giving thank for their lives even though he is now so incapacitated. St. Paul would have seen his own words lived out in her life.

This week the final reflection touches on the closing words of the chapter and an important celebration lends itself to our thinking. The passage closes;

And now faith, hope and love abide, these three and the greatest of these is love.

These three are the great pillars of Christian Life – our faith, our hope and our love, for us at Holy Trinity they shape our attitude to mission – Living faith, Joyful hope, Loving Service.

Eternal Love

Why is love the greatest?

Faith will one day not be necessary.

Earlier this week some engineers from 8th Squadron came down to tidy and care for Freddy West's grave – and more of him in a moment. They were a credit to 8th squadron and we are hatching a plot to invite them back.

On Wednesday they made a little presentation. Each speaking about various relevant topics including what they actually do. They presented us with this picture. This is their plane – they work on it, maintain it, and get to fly in it when they can.

(Note – this picture is now displayed in church, located near the sound desk)

The pilot has to have faith in the Engineers. Before and during the flight he has to have faith they have done their job properly. But once he's back on the ground and walking back to the mess he doesn't need faith because the flights over until the next time.

Faith is a gift of God that allows us to believe and it grows as we experience the goodness of God – our faith expands. But when God's kingdom comes fully – when God dwells with his people as we are promised in Revelation 21 – we shan't need faith – the reality will be there.

Similarly we have hope. We anticipate God's promises being fulfilled even when circumstances would show otherwise. I keep saying that I have hope – because however troublesome and difficult things get – the

story's not over yet. But one day all we hope for will be fulfilled and we shall need to hope no longer.

Whereas love – there is no end to love, it is eternal.

And I have this proposal.

Every act of love, true genuine love (not the self serving selfish sort which is something else), true love is also eternal. It's undimmed and unfading and every act of love reflects God's character; God is love and God is eternal. Remember – love isn't just romantic acts and it certainly isn't fluffy, timid or feeble. It's courageous and strong and absolutely unselfish. Which brings us to Freddy West – and I'd like to ask Air Commodore Dean Andrew to speak on him and today's special anniversary.

(Note – here, AC Dean Andrews spoke at length about the life and heroics of Ferdinand West, buried in the South West corner of the churchyard. Simply google "Freddie West" and Wikipedia has a great article about him)

I don't suppose that Freddie West was thinking about love when he took off 100 years ago today. Duty probably. Service. Commitment to his observer, his responsibilities and countrymen. His gathered intelligence saved lives. Had we questioned him to explain himself he might have spoken about love of King and Country. Today – we choose to remember Freddie West.

My proposal suggests that every act of love, selflessness and sacrificial will be eternal as God is eternal. Scripture tells us that greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friends. Love like that is

Eternal Love

eternal. Isn't Christ's act of love, his death and resurrection eternal? It doesn't fade or dim with the passing of time.

As we learn to live loved and we learn to love as we live, can our understanding of God and what is eternal transform the menial, unseen almost irrelevant tasks we do??

At morning prayer this week we read Psalm 139.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

²You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

³You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.

⁵You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

The job of 8th squadron is iStar - Intelligence surveillance target acquisition reconnaissance. But you are never going to get close to the knowledge that God has of each and every one of us.

He sees. He knows.

Our capacity to love is forged in the crucible of the ordinary, the everyday, the mundane. Like Eve, loving a husband who no longer recognises her. Like a parent, loving a selfish teenager. Like a spouse, learning to forgive and rebuild trust. Perfect love is part of the eternal story of God's love and like faith – is also a gift.

Where our weakness becomes apparent, there God supplies our need.