

Sharing God's love – until He comes

Ruth 4:13-17 - John 15:9-17

During the 4 weeks of Advent the sermons have focused on the four elements of our church's mission statement – John spoke of living by faith, Jane on being known by love and Gilly on being a light of hope.

Today I'm looking at our overarching theme - Sharing God's love.

Jane spoke of being Known by love - by us actually "being love" and allowing Jesus to love us, we are making God (who is love) known.

Because God has shown us his love by sending his Son - we in turn are secure in God's love, we are able to share it with all those around us.

We are familiar with the thought of sharing God's love in fellowship and friendship together – that's easy when we think about our family, our close friends and this our church family – but it also applies to our wider community – casual acquaintances, people we bump into when out and about. Absolutely everyone.

When we read about Jesus in the Bible - he is seen expressing his love to everyone – he doesn't adhere to the rules of first century society - he was a living example of love. He took time with people – welcoming little children, touching the sick and unclean, even saving a woman caught in the act of adultery from stoning and amazingly forgiving those who had nailed him to the cross.

As we heard in our Gospel reading from John "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends".

In Matthew 22 verses 37-8 Jesus himself tells us that loving God and one another were the greatest commandments of all – and we echo this in our communion liturgy each week.

And in John 13 verse 34 he repeatedly tells his disciples "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The message is loud and clear.

Share God's love. Share in it with each other. Share it with everyone.

Our Old Testament reading from Ruth illustrates a beautiful love.

It focuses on the birth of Ruth and Boaz's son – but just a quick bit of back story here might help set the sceneNaomi's husband Elimelech had emigrated from Bethlehem to Moab to escape famine taking his wife and their two sons.

Tragedy struck - first Elimelech died, then 10 years later both sons also died - leaving three widows. In those times being a widow was the worst status you could have, ignored, taken advantage of, poor and unable to support themselves.

Naomi chose to return to her family's original home – Bethlehem. One of her widowed daughters in law Ruth – who could have stayed with her own family in Moab, instead showed her care for, loyalty, love and commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi by returning with her. Saying "where you will go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."

Back in Bethlehem Naomi sends Ruth out to provide food for them both by gleaning in the fields of Boaz, a wealthy relative of hers – then through a series of definitely divinely God inspired circumstances Boaz takes Ruth for his wife and they are blessed with a son Obed who was to become the Grandfather of David and therefore forefather of Jesus.

Ruth put Naomi before herself. She left everything she had ever known to stand by Naomi's side and fulfil her commitment to her new family. Ruth shows **loyal** love – and the Hebrew word for this is hesed – a love that speaks of faithfulness, commitment and devotion.

Hesed involves action on behalf of someone in need. It describes a sense of love and loyalty that inspires merciful and compassionate behaviour to another person.

We should have hesed love for all those around us, whatever their circumstances..... Loving people doesn't cost anything – someone said recently that the most precious gift you can give to anyone - is your time – it costs nothing. Bless those around you with your time.

Loyal love means that everyone matters and everyone is valued - as they are - for who they are. If we can embody that same faithfulness, commitment and devotion to each other we shall truly be sharing God's love.

At Holy Trinity we already have many things in action enabling us to be able to share God's love with those around us. We have our monthly Foodbank and our Hardship Fund so we are able to help those who are struggling financially at the moment.

We have our weekly café where we can spend time with those who visit who would like company.

We have our Caring Cuisine where meals can be provided when there is a sudden unexpected need or change in family circumstances and we are able to reach out with food and prayer to show our love at their time of crisis.

We also have our Pastoral Team, headed up by Roz, which reaches out in love to anyone in need who is drawn to the church's attention.

We have teams that go monthly to the Dormy and Lynwood Care Homes to run communion services for the residents and another team that runs a service in the Lynwood Apartments, we also take individual home communion to those who are unable to come to church and prayer sheets into the Lynwood residents.

This year we are arranging a small festive Christmas lunch in the week after Christmas where we can share time, food and board games with those who live alone and would like to join us.

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We do a lot – but we could do so much more. Currently it's a small core team running all these activities – more volunteers would swell the current teams or enable new things to start - the more people we have - the more we can do – the more we are able to share God's love with our community.

So let us pray.

Dear Lord – thank you for your unconditional love of us. May we find more and more ways of sharing that love - that you so freely give us - with those around us – with everyone including those who are difficult or challenging to love.

May we at Holy Trinity be known for **Sharing God's Love – as we live by faith, are known by love and are a light of hope within our community.**

May we be blessed with volunteers enabling us to reach out to all those in need around us and be able to truly serve your community here in Sunningdale.

Through Jesus' name we pray – Amen

Carol Elsasser, 18/12/22