

## Being Known by Love.

1 John 4:7-12  
John 17:20-26.

I recently asked my 8 year old grandson what the word “love” meant to him. He said “Its about being kind to each other”. Probably something the children are frequently told at school! But yes I’ll take that, love is about kindness. Incidentally we were walking across a car park at the time, we passed the disabled spaces, and the next thing he said was “ Grandma, I wonder how long it will be before you’ll need one of those?”

What do we think of as love? The Bible gives us a list in 1 Cor 13,( slide 1) love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud etc. It’s an amazing list! A list that I would love to live up to and it’s also a list of characteristics of God. It’s interesting to note that patience comes first! Is that because it’s an essential ingredient to love? Notice also that this isn’t a list of feelings- happy, joyful, warm etc it’s a list of attitudes and actions. As I used to say in my work, as a therapist, if we work on changing our behaviour the feelings will follow. Loving behaviour will give rise to loving feelings.

As a church we want to “be known by love”. It’s all about relationship. We can’t love in isolation. If we behave in loving ways to each other, giving and receiving, others will observe the way we treat each other. Loving behaviour can be hard work especially if it’s only fuelled by will power. Can appropriate loving behaviour ( remembering Rev Jon’s safeguarding talk) be fuelled another way?

Speaking of love and hard work makes me think of Christmas. It’s so sad that Christmas has become so commercial and the message of Christmas so distorted. Our first reading puts the true message of Christmas in a nutshell. (Slide 2)

“This is how God showed His love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.” V9. This is what Christmas is all about, celebrating God’s love for us by sending Jesus to share our human life.

One of the things I enjoy over Christmas is watching films. Here’s the opening clip from one of my favourites ( Love Actually). ( 3 Film clip) The scenes of arrivals at Heathrow ending with words “Love really is all around”. If any of you feel you would like to experience this for yourselves Terry and I can let you know when we are next arriving at Terminal 5!

“Love is all round” is another way of saying God is all around. God is love. It’s who God is. It’s who Jesus is. God’s love is the source of all love. It connects us. God’s love is the glue in our relationships.

There are differences between God’s love and human love. So much of human love is conditional. I’ll love you if, I’ll love you when.... We can feel as if we have to look or behave a certain way, achieve, attain goals, in order to be loved. Let’s be clear, if ever we feel we have to earn love then it’s not love the way the Bible means it. God’s love is free, it’s gift, it’s unconditional. God does not love us because we are good. God loves us because God is good. He loves us just as we are, broken, sinners. It’s the opposite to what we expect. Rather than change in order to get love, it’s by receiving God’s love that we have the foundation to enable us to change and to be loving to others.

I like to think of God's love as a waterfall ( 4 photo) much bigger than this one, torrents of crystal clear water pouring down. I feel I stand at the edge reaching forward with my little cup gathering a few drops. Where what I'd like to do is stand right in the middle having the water gushing all over me. But I'm scared. Fearing I'll be washed away. But I'm not going to stay this way because God, in his kindness, will transform me to have greater confidence in His love for me.

This is good news. As I receive more of God's love, my love for God will grow and our relationship will become closer. I will be able to serve God more effectively as his love flows through me into the lives of others. This will not be the result of my mental effort but a changed way of being. Rather than "being known by love" I can "be love". If I believe God can do this for me then He can definitely do this for you too. We all have this potential through Christ. We can all "be love".

As Jesus himself says in His prayer for all believers from John 17( Slide 5)

... that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." The love God has for Jesus is in us and Jesus himself is in us by His spirit. Whilst God loves all of us equally, our relationship with God will grow as we respond to Him. Alongside this

God, by His grace, will gradually reduce my resistance to receiving His love.

Let's end with this verse from 1 John 4:12 (slide 6) "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

By loving each other we have the greatest privilege of making God visible to others. By us "being love", receiving love from Jesus, we are making God, who is love, known.

Now there's an advent challenge for us! You, me and the Church!

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