

Sermon
10 May 2015
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Text: John 15:9-17

Christian Aid Sunday

A while ago, the American TV news program 20/20 looked into how a certain company packaged and marketed chicks. These tiny chicks travelled on conveyor belts past workers who selected them to fit into a box to be shipped out and sold. The chicks were chosen by sex, size, and general appearance. But some were not chosen. The cameras followed these wee chicks as they slipped past the workers and fell off the end of the conveyer belt... To die.

That's quite shocking, isn't it? But come to think of it – in a sense we can say that that's the way of this world: If you don't fit into the box, you're rejected and maybe even left to die...

That *might* be the way of the world, but it's *not* the way that God deals with us. God doesn't choose us because we fit into a box. He chooses us because He loves us. All of us. No matter who we are, what we look like, what we've done.

He loves *all* of us. And how do we know that? Because he sent Jesus, his own son, to bear all our sins on the cross. Through Jesus he has

forgiven us every wrong thing we have ever done. Why? Because we belong to him, and he loves us.

Love.

This morning we read that because God loves us, through Jesus, we should love each other too.

But what is love?

We use the term “love” very loosely today. We say that we love somebody who is very close to us, but then we also say that we love a certain kind of car, we love sitting in the sunshine and we love eating ice cream...

I guess that is the case because “love” is a very diverse word. It’s a word that expresses affection, but in lots of different ways.

In ancient Greek, the language the New Testament was originally written in, there are 4 different words that have all been translated as “love” in our English Bibles:

- The first one is the word [*Agápe*](#) (ἀγάπη), which refers to brotherly love, charity, and the unconditional love God has for people.
- The second is [*Éros*](#) (ἔρως), referring to "intimate love", the love between a man and a woman.
- The third is [*Philia*](#) (φιλία), which can be translated with “affectionate regard” or, “friendship”.

- And lastly there is [Storge](#) (στοργή), which refers to a natural affection, like that felt by parents for their children.

So all those many years ago, people already realised that there was more to “love” than can be expressed in a single word. But at the same time I don’t think that love is complicated at all. It’s really simple, actually, and also very important.

It’s love that keeps us alive. Love, in all its different facets, is like the petrol in a car – no car can run on empty. Just like that, no person can live without love. We need to love and be loved in order to be able to live. The difference between getting petrol and being loved is just that love doesn’t cost anything and it’s freely available – always and everywhere.

When André and I got married, just over 16 years ago, we wanted to go to Greece for our honeymoon. But travelling overseas from South Africa is not very straightforward, and it was even worse 16 years ago. We needed visas to enter into Greece, and we needed to have a certain amount of money in the bank. A ridiculously high amount, I might add. Which we didn’t have of course. I had just finished my studies and Andre didn’t earn lots of money – but we were going to give it a try. So we went to the Greek embassy and got an interview with a very traditional-looking Greek lady, about the same age as my gran at the time. She hardly spoke more than 3 words to us in English, but had a million things to say to herself in Greek!

When eventually she realised we were planning our honeymoon, she threw her hands in the air and said – *love and cold water then for you!* And she gave us a visa!!

So love *was* all we needed!

Jesus asks us to love each other. That doesn't mean that we have to get on really well with every single person we meet and hug strangers all the time. I think it means that we need to respect each other. That we need to care for others.

The word used for love in the passage we read, is *agape* – brotherly, sisterly love, compassion, love without boundaries, love without preconditions. As Jesus describes it – love that turns a servant into a friend.

For a servant to become a friend today is probably quite a common occurrence. We understand that no one person is more important than the next, no matter what their status in society. But in New Testament times something like that was unheard of. Different social classes didn't mix. Befriending your servant would lead to you becoming an outcast in society.

So what Jesus is saying here is really groundbreaking. Love can do the *impossible* – it can make a master and a slave become friends. Love can change people, it can change the world.

If you say: "I love you" – it refers to something that you are *doing*. Love (in this case) is a *verb*; it's more than just a feeling. When we love, we

feel something, but that feeling then needs to turn into action for it to really become love. We love by doing. Once that key in the ignition is turned, everything in the car springs into action in order for it to be able to move. The petrol starts flowing, and that makes it possible for the driver to get somewhere! The same is true for love – when you *feel* it, it needs to put you in action before it really becomes *love*.

The best example of love I have seen in a very long time was a couple of weekends ago when I held the coffee morning to raise funds for my brother's medical expenses. He is very poorly, and far away. My hands felt tied and I didn't feel like a very good sister living a good life in this amazing country while he is struggling down there in South Africa. But then I realized that there *is* something I can do – I can try and help him to afford the treatment he so desperately needs. Expensive treatment he needs to pay for himself. Hence, the coffee morning, where we raised a little more than £3600. Probably 4 times more than I expected.

And all the baking, time and money was given by people who have never even met him. By you. Because you have compassion. Because you care. Because you love. And that in turn made *me* feel loved. And it is changing my brother's life. It's changing his world.

And the exact same thing is true for any charity or charitable cause you support, by giving goods, money, time or prayers. There are so many different ways in which we can love – we can support a good cause, like Christian Aid, who changes the lives of millions of people for the better; we can be a good friend, neighbour, parent, spouse; we can be considerate drivers, friendly shoppers, caring strangers.

We can show our love in so many ways. Like I said – it's very easy to love. It doesn't really matter *how* we do it, as long as we do it.

Because God loves us. He loves us all the way to the cross and back. And not a single person who understands what *that* means can just ignore it.

God loves YOU. Whether you fit in the box, or not. And because he loves you he will *never* let you fall. So let's love him back, by loving others.

Amen