

**Sermon**  
**19 November 2017**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

**1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

**Guild Sunday**

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I have very fond memories of my Uni days. I studied at the University of Pretoria, and stayed in halls on the University grounds.

I loved Sundays – because then all of us would go to church together. Our church was called Philadelphia, which means brotherly/sisterly love.

It was right next to the University Campus, and it would be filled with students, so much so that we sometimes had to bring in extra seats. So as you can imagine, the singing was amazing.

When our minister was on holiday, it would always be one of the Professors from the Faculty of Theology who would stand in for him, and on those Sundays, the theology students walked on eggshells. We would be on our best behaviour and make sure we listened properly to the sermon, because the next day we could well be quizzed on what was said...

I'm telling you all this, because one Sunday, in my 1<sup>st</sup> year, our Old Testament Professor stepped onto the pulpit, and the reading was Deuteronomy 6, which we have just read together.

This professor was a huge, angry-looking man, and as if that wasn't bad enough, he glared at us all from above (the pulpit was high), and then, in a thundering voice, pounding his fist on the pulpit, he said in fluent Hebrew: "Sh'ma, Yisra'el! Sh'ma Philadelphia! ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad" [Hear, Israel! Hear Philadelphia! The Lord our God, The Lord is one].

If it was his intention to wake us up after a late night, he succeeded very well. And those words are engraved in my brain since that Sunday: Listen Israel. Listen West Calder/Polbeth Harwood. The Lord our God is the only God. And therefore we should love him with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength.

In other words – we should love him with everything we are.

Today is Guild Sunday in the Church of Scotland. And the Guild theme for this year is "Go in love..."

For the Israelites it was so important to be obedient to this command of God, that they interpreted this wee passage from Deuteronomy literally.

In verse 7 we read that they had to talk about this commandment when they lay down and when they get up. And from that time, until this very day – Jews say these words as a prayer first thing when they get up in

the morning, and it is also the last words on their lips before they fall asleep at night.

Verses 8 and 9 say: “Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Meaning, of course, that the love for God should rule your hands and your head, and you shouldn’t forget about it when you are out and about.

But to help them remember this, the Jews made prayer bands that they wrapped around their arms and foreheads, with this passage inside a wee leather pouch, and they also placed these words in a wee box and attached it to their doorframes. And every time they went in or out the door, they touched or even kissed it, and thus remembered that loving God has to always be their first priority.

This is how important it was (and still is) to them to remember that God is the only God, that he loves his children, and therefore his children should love one another as well.

If we move on to the New Testament – in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul elaborates on what love is.

Paul had his hands full with the people in Corinth. They tried to outsmart each other with all the amazing things they could do. But in this letter the apostle tells them that no matter what they think the most important gift or talent is – love is more important than that.

Because if love is the foundation of whatever you do, the outcome will be good, everlasting even.

So what is love? A group of children were asked what they think love is. Their answers were interesting, to say the least! Let me share a few of these answers with you:

One said, "Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you've left him alone all day."

Another said, "Love is when my mummy makes a cup of coffee for my daddy & takes a little sip before she gives it to him to make sure it tastes okay."

One boy said, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth."

Another thoughtfully responded, "You really shouldn't say, 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it you should say it a lot, because people forget."

And finally, a 7 year old boy said, "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents & listen."

Sometimes, without even realising it, children are very wise...

Unfortunately, the "love" that the world proclaims and the "love" we learn about in the Bible, is not the exact same thing...

Because according to Hollywood, love is an amazing feeling that gives you butterflies in your stomach, but like any other feeling – it can come and go.

The love of the Bible is nothing of the kind though. It's not only something you feel, it's more than that. It's something you do. Whether you *feel* like it, or not...

When I was preparing my sermon, I read so many beautiful love stories on the internet – stories that changed people; which made their lives or the lives of people around them meaningful. But then, when I had to decide which one of these I'll share with you today, I realised that the most amazing love story of all time, is not to be found somewhere on the internet; it's one I've known for as long as I can remember.

It's about this Father, who was so worried about the fact that nobody seemed to let their lives be governed by love, that he sent his son to go teach everybody what love means:

To show them that if you truly love someone...

- You say sorry, even when it wasn't your fault.
- You *make* time for friends and strangers when they need you, even if you don't have a minute to spare.
- You forgive those who hurt you – *every* time.
- Instead of joining in on the gossip about someone, you remember that that person has feelings too, and that nobody ever knows the full story.

This son didn't only speak about love, he LIVED it. He didn't take "me-time" every now and again, and he never once put himself before anybody else.

And in the end, he *literally* gave his life for friend and stranger. This man, of course, was Jesus.

His story is the most precious love story of all...

Years later, the apostle Paul tried to put what love is in words. He said that:

- Love is patient;
- Love is kind;
- It does not envy;
- It does not boast;
- It is not proud;
- It is not rude;
- It is not self-seeking;
- It is not easily angered;
- It keeps no record of wrongs;
- Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.
- It always protects,
- Always trusts,
- Always hopes,
- Always perseveres...

Love is the most natural thing in the world, God MADE us to love. If we do the opposite, we are acting against our nature, and that actually takes more out of us, than just doing what we were made to do: LOVE.

So why do we forget this so easily?

Maybe the Jews have it right! Maybe we should hammer these words on our doorframes, or attach it to our bodies, as a constant reminder that because we are loved so deeply by God, we should love too.

Love should be at the root of every single thing we say and do.

So listen, West Calder/Polbeth Harwood:

The Lord our God is the only God.

LOVE Him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Because if you do that, you will love all those around you too, automatically.

Amen