

14 February 2020

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Nanda Groenewald

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Hymn: CH4 622 We sing a love

PRAYER

O God of love, who is love, and who gives love –
we worship and adore you as the source of all love.
We turn our faces to the illumination of your love,
so that we may share the true love that comes from you.
We look to your light, we marvel in your majesty,
we revel in the rapture of being loved by you.

We confess that we easily do the opposite of loving our neighbours and
ourselves Lord, please forgive us.

Frail and faltering is our understanding of love, Lord.
We cannot even understand the loves in our earthly lives.

And so, we look to you as we learn and explore what love is.
Lead us, Lord, that we may grow in love towards you
and towards one another.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray:
Our Father, Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come.
Thy Will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.
Forever,
Amen.

READING

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a

child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

MESSAGE

Today is Valentine's Day. And in a couple of days, it will be Shrove Tuesday, or Pancake Day, as many of you will know it.

So, here's an idea: Why not show your loved ones how much they mean to you, by making them pancakes?

And if you don't know how to, well, that's not a problem. Because I would now like to share a pancake-making tutorial with you, presented by our very own CELEBRITY CHEFS!

(Video clip)

Amazing guys! Flipping a pancake right into someone else's plate – well, that's a skill I haven't mastered yet!

So, no excuses everyone! I'd love to see pictures of all the fab pancakes you'll be making between today and Tuesday!!

But where does Pancake Day come from? For those of you who don't know – here is a quick recap:

The 7 weeks leading up to Easter is called Lent. For Christians, Lent is a time of reflection, a time to think of what the death and resurrection of Jesus means.

Lent starts on Ash Wednesday, the day after Shrove Tuesday.

Traditionally, Lent was seen as a time to abstain from certain foods, to help maintain the focus on the suffering of Jesus.

Shrove Tuesday always falls 47 days before Easter Sunday, so the date varies from year to year and falls between February the 3rd and March the 9th.

Shrove Tuesday was the last opportunity to use up eggs and fats before embarking on the Lenten fast, and pancakes are the perfect way of using up these ingredients.

But why do we do all these things? Why do we celebrate *Easter* in the first place? Because God loves us so much that he sent his Son to give his life, for us.

It's all about *love*. And that's why I thought that there is no better day than *today* to talk about LOVE! Because on Valentine's Day the world celebrates love. The love that we as Christians celebrate is not the exact same thing though...

You've probably all heard about the 4 different types of love mentioned in the original Greek text of the New Testament. Love is such a multi-

faceted concept, that I can completely understand why the Greeks had 4 different words for it! These are:

- Storge – empathetic love.
- Philia – friendship love.
- Eros – romantic love.
- And Agape – unconditional **love** – the love God has for us.

In his letter to the congregation in Corinth, the apostle Paul addressed lots of different issues. He tackled the rivalry between different factions in the church, and this beautiful passage about love is sandwiched in-between two sections about spiritual gifts.

They just couldn't agree about what was more important, and then Paul explains it to them in no uncertain terms: He said that if you do not live a life grounded in love, it will count for nothing... So no matter what you regard as the most important spiritual gift, if you don't use this gift in love, you can just as well not use it at all.

Without love, these gifts would be as empty as the sounds of the copper gongs and symbols the pagans sounded at their festivals.

I think that after living in different phases of Lockdown for almost a year now, all of us have had plenty time to think about the things and the people we love. And I don't think a single person will ever take a loving cuddle for granted again!

Being able to live in love is something that God built into us. We can all do it. And we miss sharing it with our wider circles of family and friends

at the moment! But it takes practice to get it right – almost like flipping a pancake.

Unfortunately, the world we live in draws a different picture of love to the one God draws for us in the Bible.

I think most of us watched far more telly than we usually do, this past year, and in so many stories, factual and fiction alike, we see how the world understands love: Love for yourself seems to be more important than anything else. Which means that if someone hurts you, it's okay to hurt them back, or to ignore them completely, or to cut them out of your life. Forgiving and forgetting are not very high on the list of priorities, because YOU have a right to feel what you feel, and to act upon it, no matter the cost to others.

But if you think about this, you will see that the love the world believes in, whether this is romantic love or love for friends and family, is based on *feelings* alone.

The love God has for us, and the love God wants us to have for others, *agape* love, is not like that. It's much more than just a feeling. It's something you DO.

Agape love knows no boundaries – it even includes your enemies.

Agape love lasts forever – it is even stronger than death. *Agape* love is patient, it is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. It does not delight in evil but rejoices with

the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres...

Real love is hard work. It can be very difficult, because we don't always find it easy to place the needs of others above our own.

But let's choose for that. Let's strive to live in love, real love, because God loved us first... Let's make *that* our focus this Lent; and if we can manage to live in love for 7 weeks in a row, we would have formed a new habit, and we'll be able to do it forever!

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I would like to conclude this sermon with a wee love story I grew up with. It involves pancakes!

Just to get you in the picture: In South Africa, we call crepes pancakes, and we call Scottish pancakes flapjacks, and we call Scottish flapjacks oat cookies – but let me stop there before I confuse you completely!!

My mum was one of the kindest people I have ever met. She would do anything to make her family happy, and she was a brilliant cook.

Every single time it rained in South Africa, we would call it “pancake weather”, and then she would make us crepes.

Now obviously it doesn't rain there as often as it does here, because this was always a huge treat!

My dad loved her crepes, and she started making him crepes to take to his work for lunch. Every day, for almost a year. And every evening she would ask him how he enjoyed it. And his response would always be: “It was fantastic, thanks Dear!”

But one fateful day, he said: “I really appreciate your effort, but the pancakes weren’t that great today!” Big mistake! My mum said that she wouldn’t ever make him pancakes again!

My mum kept her promise for something like 14 years, but then her heart crumbled and she started making my dad pancakes again. For which he – without fail – always praised her!!

So although she didn’t want to ever forgive him for insulting her cooking skills, she couldn’t help it – because she loved him. And to this day we joke about this!

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May our love for others always be bigger than whatever else is going on in our lives.

I would like to leave you to reflect on this, while we listen to the beautiful CH4 519:

Love divine, all loves excelling
Joy of Heaven to Earth come down
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling
All Thy faithful mercies crown
Jesus, Thou art all compassion
Pure, unbounded love Thou art

Visit us with Thy salvation
Enter every trembling heart
Amen

HYMN

CH4 622

We sing a love that sets all people free,
that blows like wind, that burns like scorching flame,
enfolds the earth, springs up like water clear:
come, living love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love that seeks another's good,
that longs to serve and not to count the cost,
a love that, yielding, finds itself made new:
come, caring love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love, unflinching, unafraid
to be itself, despite another's wrath,
a love that stands alone and undismayed:
come, strengthening love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love that, wandering, will not rest
until it finds its way, its home, its source,
through joy and sadness pressing on refreshed:
come, pilgrim love, live in our hearts today.

We sing the Holy Spirit, full of love,
who seeks out scars of ancient bitterness,

brings to our wounds the healing grace of Christ:
come, radiant love, live in our hearts today.