

Dear loved – 1 John 4. 7-21

Opening Prayer

God of love, come amongst us by your Spirit and reveal the height, length, breadth and depth of your extraordinary love. **AMEN**

Intro

What makes the world go round do you think? Money as the old saying goes? Money seems very important to us? Billionaires blasting themselves into space, millionaires sunning themselves from beautiful places around the world – money surely guarantees you a good life? Yes/No? Football, the British love affair with football, surely we can win? My son Joshua is very funny watching sport with me, he provides a running commentary on my attitude. Dad why are you so negative? Well son – I've been here before, feeling optimistic does not guarantee us success, sport is a wonderful but tough business, there can only be one winner - and the past disappointments have left their mark, so I'm not sure I'm going to give my heart to the England Football team again? Sound familiar? Which brings us to Love? Surely love energises our lives and drives our choices? Surely its love?

Love

Love sounds the right answer. John writes that God is love. Nearly all of us will have heard that the heart of the good news of Christianity is about love. God is love. 7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 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. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. God is love and God has supremely shown his love for us in and through the person of Jesus Christ.

Love. During his life Jesus was asked, which is the greatest commandment? “Love the

Love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself'. Love. When Jesus knew that he was going to die the next day, he talked about love 31 times in John 13-17. Jesus talked about love. He wanted his followers to demonstrate that love to each other and to the world. It is about love. Love is at the centre

One writer puts it like this "Love, for the Christian; love for a human being, is like soil that a tree is planted in without which the tree will die. Love is like water for a fish. Love is like air for our lungs. Love is the rooting, love is the environment, love is the atmosphere, and love is our eternal destiny. What is heaven other than to be embraced by the love of God for eternity."

But what is this love?

We've talked before about the competing images of what true love really looks like, but how do you know if you're loved? How do we assess and measure love? When have you known that you're loved by someone? In reality it's both objective and subjective

Love is objective, in the way we make choices day by day. When we have led the marriage course we always recommend the "5 love languages by Gary Chapman", that talk about how we give and receive love in real and practical ways, through our words, our touch, our time, our gifts and what we do.....because love is a fleshed out word and has many dimensions.

But love is also intuitive. You can tell by feel; you can tell by touch. It's like the difference between counterfeit money and real money. You can feel the difference. Most of us will be able to recall moments in our lives when we 'Truly felt loved' or not!!!

God's love is high, long, wide and deep, it's multi-coloured and multi-dimensional. God's love for you and me is unconditional. Our obedience doesn't provoke him to love us more and our disobedience doesn't provoke God to stop loving us. But if you and I

are to live in an experience of God's love, stay rooted in God's love, live out of a center in the love of God, then then we need to learn how to receive it and give it

Our modern therapeutic culture offers so many counterfeits of genuine love. So we need to turn again and again to the God of scripture to open up what God's love looks like. At the turn of the century one of England's finest writers GK Chesterton wrote about God's love as a furious love seeking to capture the enormous energy and strength of God's love in seeking to be united to us. I've grown to love the description of God's love as furious, counterbalances the very passive images of God's love we often talk about and reflects for me the way Jesus dealt with brokenness and evil in the gospels.

Love in Culture

How do we recognize love? Different generations might answer this question differently, but this is a story from a student, I read this week

"She broke up with her boyfriend and insisted that he take every single gift back that he had ever given her – all the music, jewellery, cards, lots of little sentimental items. She said, "I told him to leave because that's what he wanted to do anyway." He said: "How am I going to carry all of this stuff across campus?"

She screamed, "You'll figure it out. You've got arms and legs. Get out; go away." She wrote that there was a part of her that thought maybe the next day he would be outside of her window hitting it with pebbles, singing love songs. Or maybe he would be standing outside in the cold crying, howling apologies up at the window. Months later she thought maybe I'll come home and he will be standing by my door begging me to forgive him and we would smooch our faces off and then he would kneel down and propose to me.

That never happened. She said that after she looked at her mixed feelings about the break up and what she was hoping for over the next couple of years, she realized something really pathetic about herself – that her definition of love came from the astonishing number of romantic comedies that she had seen over the course of her life. Her very vulnerable article reminded me of the classic romantic comedy, Sleepless

in Seattle. In the movie, every time Meg Ryan needed guidance about her love life, she would re-watch the old Cary Grant film, An Affair To Remember. So Meg Ryan's best friend, Rosie O'Donnell said to her: A movie – that's your problem. You don't want to be in love, you want to be in love in a movie."

Love that heals

Our deepest longings for genuine love, our longing for intimacy, can never be met by human beings or things. We were created to be in a relationship with the God of love and we will only find the deep contentment and satisfaction our hearts desire, by being united to the perfect God of love in Jesus. God's love is a healing love, a forgiving love, an accepting love, a generous love, a holy love, a gracious love, a merciful love, a compassionate love, a patient, kind and tender love.....Have you experienced the healing love of God in your heart?

When I was 19 I went with a mission agency to do some evangelism in Europe for the Summer and I found myself on the preparation week, in Ghent in Belgium, listening to a pastor called Floyd McClung speak. Floyd worked with prostitutes in the red light districts of Amsterdam and was sharing about the Father Heart of God. He spent his ministry working with some of the toughest women, talking about the tender and unconditional love of Father God for his people. It was as I listened to him talk that I really started to realise how much God really loved me.....I wept and wept as the transforming love of God started to get to work, cleaning out the sense of unworthiness and inadequacy, healing the hurt and pain of the incomplete love we experience as humans and starting to set my heart free from guilt and shame.....the great power of love changing my life from the inside out.....restoring and healing.. All of us want to feel something of the joy of heaven now.

The Bible uses a lot of words to describe the intimate love of Jesus for us. We are called God's children, God's sons and daughters; his friends, his heirs and co-heirs, God is the lover of our souls God really does want to know us and for us to experience his amazing love.

The Love of Christ

AND The great demonstration of God's love is the self-sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross for us failed and flawed human beings **1 Jn 4:10** This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Love is demonstrated. It is one person choosing to put the needs of another person ahead of their own needs. It is one person choosing to sacrifice their own dreams, their own goals, their own ambitions – their convenience, their money, their sleep to promote the dreams and goals and ambitions of another person. And supremely, one person laying down their life for another person. And that's what Jesus has done for us, given his life for us so that we could spend eternity united to the supreme love of our Creator God. Our hearts long to be ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. That's what Jesus' extraordinary love has done for us. Of course this morning you can continue to place your love in all the things of the world, but your soul will never find rest. God longs for you to respond to his the transforming power of his love - TODAY

Let's Pray

Thank you for that your love for us this morning is personal. It matters to you. You long for us to respond and receive your love. Thank you too, that you love St Swithin's unconditionally, with a beautiful, furious holy love that longs to draw us closer and nearer into your heart and purposes

Would you have your way with us this morning.....

Come Holy Spirit and give us the power to love those around us and show your Good News