

LOVE WHAT MATTERS **Sunday 27 February**

Scripture 1 John 2:15-17

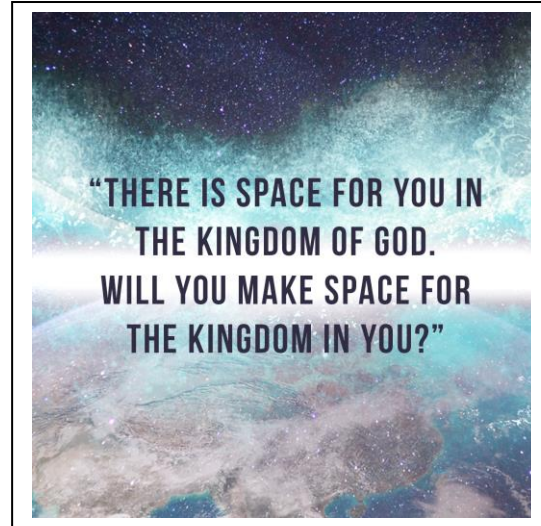
When I began to work on this sermon, the chorus of a song by the Beatles popped into my mind.

All you need is love

All you need is love

All you need is love, love

Love is all you need



The next thing that popped into my mind was the question – How many songs have been written about love? There is no accurate number because it is in the millions.

So, a question for each of you to ponder, hopefully when the sermon is finished.

How many love songs can you remember?

I will mention one more song about love – Love makes the world go around.

That statement is true however it is more than that.

God created our world out of love and He created He saw was good. Finally, He created humankind, male and female, in His own image and He saw that was good. But who He made was not good – for Adam and Eve sinned by rebelling against God through the serpent's evil act of tempting them, and they succumbed by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God could have given up then but He did not. Instead, He set in place His plan for the salvation of sinning humankind that came to fruition with the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

He continued that project despite what we read in the Bible about the poor record of humankind in being true to Him. Why He did so is summed up in John 3:16 –

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Humankind has a very poor record with sin. The Bible, as I have mentioned, is full of stories of humankind sinning. There was Adam and Eve, and soon after there was Cain who killed his brother, Abel.

There was Noah's Flood when God almost wiped out what He had created because of the foulness of sin.

There was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of sin.

Then there was the sin of individuals – David committing adultery with Bathsheba killed, and having her husband, Uriah, killed. Then there was Solomon, their son, who rebelled against God's commandments given to Moses at Mt Sinai, by having 400 wives and 300 concubines, mostly from the pagan nations and they helped Israel sin by bringing idol worship into the nation. There are many more examples.

Then came Jesus.

At the Last Supper Jesus said, as John relates in 13: 34 –

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Now, who was this John?

He was one of two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and both were fishermen. They were known as Boanerges, the Sons of Thunder, perhaps because of the power of their preaching. John is the disciple to whom Jesus, dying on the Cross, gave his mother Mary to be her carer. He is the writer of the Gospel of John, of Revelation and three letters, 1,2 and 3 John.

John was later living at Ephesus and was exiled to the Isle of Patmos where he received the revelation that became his final work. He was still living in Ephesus when he wrote the letters. They were probably written between AD 85 and 90.

Why were they written?

False teachers had entered the church and were denying the incarnation of Christ. That is, they were saying that Jesus was not God's Son. That false statement is still around today. It is a statement that many people are promoting in so many ways. False teachers abound in the world.

1 John has three themes that God is light; that God is love; and that God is life.

The opposite to light is darkness. The opposite to love is hate. The opposite to life is death. Through the sacrifice of Jesus these negatives can be overcome by looking up and not down or around.

The reading begins with the statement – ¹⁵ *Do not love the world or anything in the world.*

It is a very startling statement. It does not, however, mean that we should not love our parents, our brothers and sisters, our partners, our children, or our neighbours. To not love them is to go against God's will

that we should love one another. It does mean that this love should not be excessive or over-whelming, but it should be conditioned with responsibility.

John goes on to speak of lust. A dictionary definition of lust is to have a strong, excessive, or an inordinate desire for something or someone.

John speaks of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

How often do we see examples of that around us?

Consider the lust of the eyes. We see it on the news. How often does the camera linger on an attractive woman rather than one who is plainer in appearance? How often is a plainer appearing person overlooked for a job in favour of someone who appears flashier? We see it in the movies and in TV shows. We see it in hospitality venues. The lust of the eyes is linked with the lust of the flesh. We only need to go back to King David. But it is more than a sexual response.

How often do we see the flashier car and think “Wow! I would like to own that.” I admit here that my eyes are often drawn to older cars, often vintage or antique. How many males here today in person, or on-line, will honestly say they have not had that reaction?

And what of the ladies and a lovely dress?

Whatever we consider our treasures on earth, all comes down to lust.

And what of pride?

It is natural to feel pride in something. It may be our achievements. It may be our possessions. But pride can develop into more. It can develop into arrogance. It can develop into a mindset where we feel contempt for those who have not achieved what we have achieved.

We should always remember Proverbs 16:18 –

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

And 2 Samuel 1:27a –

“How the mighty have fallen!”

Yet, we do have a right to be proud – if our achievements please God.

This church has a right to be proud that, COVID permitting, the community breakfast has been feeding people for fourteen years this year, if my memory serves me correctly.

But the pride meant here is about self-pride which can lead to haughtiness. Think of the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

Let me remind you of the story from Luke chapter 18 verses 9 to 14:

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

¹⁴ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will

be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Pride, haughtiness, self-righteousness, all names for the same thing, all of which God does not approve.

None of these things, lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh and pride are not love, as God defines it. None are the love that matters.

We read in Mark 12:28 – 31 when a teacher of the law asked Jesus “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

Jesus answered:

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength¹ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. He had been asked the question “Who is my neighbour?” He gave the answer:

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and

when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denari^[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

Jesus asked the questioner “Who was the neighbour?”

The answer came “The one who was merciful.”

I have just finished reading a book called *God Next Door: Spirituality & Mission in the Neighbourhood*. It was written by an Australian author, a theologian who teaches at Whitley College which is part of the Melbourne University of Divinity.

The cover of this book states the questions:

- What if God lived next door?
- Would it make any difference to your neighbourhood?
- Would it make any difference to your role as a neighbour?

Challenging questions, aren't they?

In the Eugene Peterson translation of the Bible, *The Message*, also known as *The Bible in Contemporary Language*, John 1:14 says that “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.”

Can you imagine that – Jesus living next door to you?

Of course, that did happen over 2000 years ago. If it happened the same way would Jesus be recognised? Would He be accepted?

We know that when Jesus declared His ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth He was rejected. Given the state of the world today, it is probable that there would be the same reaction.

We should never forget the words of John 3:16 –

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

These words can never be spoken often enough.

There is a lovely hymn written in 1885 by Christina Rossetti who lived between 1830 and 1894 –

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.
Worship we the Godhead,
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,
Worship we our Jesus,
But wherewith for sacred sign?
Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

That is the love that matters – God’s love for us and our love for God.
That love should govern our lives, once we accept Jesus in our hearts

and minds. That love should govern all our actions, our words and all we do in life.

It is that love with which we should regard our neighbours.

Who are our neighbours?

They are the people we sit with in church.

They are the people who live around us.

They are the people we pass in the street, sit with on public transport, sit near us in a café or hotel.

They are humanity.

God sent Jesus to be the salvation of the world. Jesus sent his disciples out to convert the world. He sent them to all humankind. Thus all humankind is our neighbour.

I will end with a prayer.

*O God,
whose Son has taught us that love is the fulfillment of your law:
stir up within us the fire of your Holy Spirit,
and pour into our hearts your greatest gift of love,
so that we may love you with our whole being,
and our neighbours as ourselves;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who loves and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen*