

## Knowing that we are Loved

Our topic this morning is "knowing that we are loved". Our present sermon series is revisiting our vision, to live by faith, to be known by love and to be a voice of hope. The truth is we cannot love others and, therefore, be known by love unless we know that we are loved.

The human need to be loved is universal. Psychologists agree that it is one of our most basic and fundamental needs.

As many of you know I have recently retired after working for a counselling charity for 28 years and it was this whole concept of recognising how desperately we need to be loved that motivated me in this work. If I were to summarise the underlying issue that brings thousands of people to seek counselling, it would be that they feel unloved, and sensing that if they could feel loved they would find happiness. I am convinced that relationships of love are what life is really all about. So many human problems come about as a result of looking for love in unhealthy ways or trying to dull the pain of feeling unloved.

I'm going to look at the subject of knowing we are loved under 3 headings.

The world view

The Christian view

And practical implications

How do we know we are loved? When we are cared for, someone is kind, affectionate and generous to us. When there are warm feelings, attraction. If we are lucky we could say that we know we are loved because our parents cared for us nurtured us, and modelled love for us. The traditional world view is that a man and a woman fall in love, marry and wish to extend their love by having children and building a family. And then the hard work really starts! But modern day life is so much more diverse and complicated than it used to be.

How does this world view help us if we have been rejected, abandoned, abused.? Human love is fallible, we hurt each other and let each other down. Is there a deeper level at which we can know we are loved? Something we can hang on to, no matter what life throws at us. This is where we need to look at the Christian take on all this. A bit of theology to start with.

The Bible tells us "God is love", this gives us a totally new way of thinking about love, Love is so much more than a feeling. God does not send love. God is love.

Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start. The first words on the first page of the bible are "In the beginning God". The first chapter of Genesis gives us the story of creation, God already existed and he spoke the world into being. It is only God who can create from nothing. When we create, and achieve anything, it is only possible because of the raw materials and talents that God has given us.

Genesis 1 verse 26 says something very curious. "Let us make mankind in our image" who is this "us"? The name of this church gives us a clue. Holy Trinity. The holy Trinity. We believe in one God who exists in three persons. It's a hard concept to grasp. Sue and David have been illustrating it to the children in school assemblies they have taken, by talking about water, existing in 3 forms liquid, steam and ice but all H<sub>2</sub>O. The father, son and spirit live in a self sustaining community. A seventh century theologian called Maximus the confessor said " the foundation of existence is not being but love". The father, son and holy spirit live in a community of mutually self giving love. In affect a circle where each loves, honours, and glorifies the other.

If God is so happy living in this circle of community as father, son and spirit why are we here? Why would he go to all the trouble of creating us and thus opening himself up to all the grief and pain of rejection when so many of the human race deny Him.

There can only be one answer. Love. Love is always worth it. God must have created us, not to get anything from us, but to give to us. God made us to experience his love. He must have created us to invite us into this loving circle of community. The father, son and spirit want to expand their family by inviting us to join them. Experiencing this divine love is what we were made for.

No matter how we came to be born, naturally as far as God is concerned, none of us are a mistake. His love for us is unconditional. You may have heard this phrase "nothing you can do can make God love you more and nothing you can do can make God love you less". God loves you.

The Christian faith tells us we are loved. In Jesus, God shows how far that love is willing to go for us. Jesus' death on the cross was a one off event in history but its benefits to us are everlasting, its implications are personal and individual. When we accept this truth we see life differently knowing how deeply we are each loved by God.

Let's consider the practical implications making reference to our bible reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 13. I have often prayed for more of God's love to fill me and one day it struck me that if the Bible is true that God is love, then love is not a commodity, something that could be manufactured and delivered, but that love is a person. If we look at love this way then how our reading takes on a different meaning.

We have said God is Love, God is a person, love is a person, so the characteristics described in verses 4 to 7 show us what God is like. Love is patient, love is kind, God is patient, God is kind etc. these words describe the most wonderful person and I so often wish I displayed more of these characteristics. This is what spiritual growth is all about. Where ever God is present, love will be present and the more we can spend time in God's company, praying, reading the bible, worshiping God, the more love we will personally experience and we will have more love available within us to risk loving others.

Every time we do something for another person expecting nothing in return we are demonstrating God's love to the world. Human life at its best models divine life.

Let me end with a story. My nephew James was diagnosed with a brain tumour when he was eight. My sister met another family in the hospital who's little girl also had a brain tumour. James was diagnosed with cancer and had surgery and radiotherapy. The little girl's family felt relieved when they were told that her tumour was benign. Tragically she died the following year and on the order of service at her funeral were written the words "it's not the number of years that count, it's the love you gave".

This is what life is all about, knowing we are loved and loving others. It will hurt at times but it will be worth it. Mother Teresa says "do small things with great love". If we can do this we will indeed be known by love.

Amen.