

## Let us Love One Another

*Sermon for the Parish of South Darebin, Easter 5, 28 April 2024*  
*Acts 8:26-40; Ps 22:26-32; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8*

The Reverend Canon Christopher Carolane

I wonder, are you a good lover?

Now before you get too cross with me for asking such an impertinent question – and in church, of all places – let me explain what I mean.

Often, we hear Jesus' words quoted in church: "‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."  
(Matthew 22)

Love God with everything that you are. Love others as you love yourself. All of God's laws hang on these two laws of love. And so it is in this context that I ask you: Are you a good lover?

In our epistle reading today, the first letter of John, the writer urges us:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God (1 John 4: 7)

And a little later:

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4: 8)

So ... are you a good lover?

To be able to answer this question properly, I think we need to first answer the question I posed in my message to you in this week's Weekly News. That question was, 'what does it really mean to love one another'? In the context in which Jesus spoke, and in the context of John's words in today's epistle, what does the verb to love really mean? We know that we are called to love others, but what are the characteristics of that loving?

'I love my wife', 'I love chocolate', 'I love to see Collingwood win', 'I love my dog', all have different meanings. Surely God does not want us to love our neighbours in the same way that we love a Collingwood win (or loss perhaps)!

The author of our epistle uses the word love in no less than 23 verses in this one short letter and the word love appears 21 times in John's gospel. If we look a little closer in all of 1 John, we will find that John does define what he means by love in several places.

...but whoever obeys his [that is God's] word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. (1 John 2: 5:)

The love of God is found in people who obey God's word.

We know love by this, that he (Jesus) laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? (1 John 3: 16–17)

How challenging is that!? Just as Jesus laid down his life for us, we must lay down our lives for one another. In other words, we should put others well and truly before ourselves. John goes on to expand on this thought in his next sentence:

How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees people in need and yet refuses to help them?

God calls us to be generous people, sharing what we have with those in need. Generosity is one characteristic of Godly love, in the same way that God generously sent his son to die for us. We love others when we share what we have with them. I think this probably strikes deep in our hearts if we are honest because I suspect that many of us love what we have more than we are prepared to admit. After all, we have worked hard for it, haven’t we? The Scriptures say in another place, “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil”. Note that it says the love of money, not money itself! If God has blessed us with money and goods, we show our love to others by sharing them with those in need.

John goes a step further in the very next verse:

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. (1John 3:18)

He makes it clear. True, Godly love is not about mushy feelings we might have in our heart, or even about us simply saying nice things to others. Godly love involves action on our behalf towards the ones we are loving. It was through God’s action in sending Jesus to the earth that God’s love was revealed to us. Attending church and saying our prayers are important, but by themselves they are not enough. We are called to act, to do what we can to help those around us who are in need.

In verse 10 of chapter 4, John states:

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

You will recall that on the night that he was betrayed, after Jesus had eaten his last meal with his friends, he took off his outer robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and washed the feet of his friends. Jesus took the role of a servant in true humility doing this most lowly of tasks. It was as a servant that Jesus showed his love for his friends. After doing so, he said “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord, and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (John 13: 12b –15)

We are called to love in action of service to those we love. May I suggest that you ponder this thought. What does it mean for you to be a ‘foot washer’? How is that enacted today in 2024? How should we as the community of Christians in South Darebin ‘wash each other’s feet’?

As the parish looks forward to the future, I believe these are important questions to answer.

In verses 19–20 of today’s epistle, John says this:

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

If we truly love God, we will love those around us. John is saying that love of God and hatred of others are mutually exclusive. Sadly, we sometimes see hatred within the church. Fellow Christians argue and fight (usually verbally, but I have known of situations where the fight has become physical). John is saying such attitudes and actions have no place amongst those who truly love God because God is love, and as he says in verse 16, those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

John concludes this passage with this summary statement:

The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (1 John 4: 21)

And so, I conclude where I began: are you a good lover?

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God (1 John 4: 7)

Amen.