

BCC3: LOVE

Ephesians 5:31-33, Matthew 5:43-48 [MW20-07]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 16 February 2020

[Slide 1 on]

You know it would be so easy, there is a real temptation, to take the 'soft option' on love

- to go all soft and gooey
to tell you nice stories which warm your heart
but I have resisted, because ... well I hope you will see why
- and also please let me give this qualification
love is in reality a really, really tricky subject
because many of us have been hurt by relationships
- so please hear me when I say there is no judgement or condemnation
this is about the aim, the ideal, encouragement
and not just for marriage, but for all relationships

The reality is sometimes things work out well ... and sometimes they just don't

- and through it all God promises to embrace us
all of which is why the picture I begin with
the image I have in my head when I try to "define" love
- is baby Jesus in the manger [Slide 2]
all that stuff we think of at Christmas, which everybody likes and is happy with
- along with the shadow of Jesus in agony on the cross [Slide 3]
Good Friday, which even Christians find hard

"Love" for me includes all of this

- and Paul writes about it in Ephesians chapter 5
in a way which says to me, if you're aiming for nice stories which warm the heart
it doesn't just happen
- it doesn't fall out of the sky, land in your lap, grow on trees
it requires something, and there is a cost

Love costs – that's what makes it love [Slide 4]

- that's what makes it worthwhile, worth the world, the whole universe even

Love, and specifically love that leads to and sustains marriage

- is more than what Mills and Boon books and Hollywood movies give us
they usually end with a version of that fairytale ending:
"and they all lived happily ever after"
- I'm sorry but that really is a fairytale
if we want it to happen, Paul outlines how it can
Paul says there are some things each partner must do
there is some effort to be put in, a "cost" to be paid
- and also a wonderful blessing to be enjoyed and shared

Biblical Scholar John Stott writes: [Slide 5]

- *If our Christian faith is of any practical value
it must teach us how to behave Christianly at home*
- the energy and commitment put into marriage
is itself a witness to those "outside" the faith
how can you stick with it for 30, 40, 50 years?!
- actually, how have you even managed double figures ... ?
- the way that Christian wives and husbands treat each other can be a witness
so let me encourage you, because, as I said last week, people are watching

Those of us who are married have a unique opportunity to witness

- by the quality of our relationship
how we love each other, show care and respect ... how we stick with it
- and those of us who are not married are not let off
because what works for marriage, works for all relationships
- each and everyone of us who has responded to the call of Jesus
has the opportunity demonstrate this amazing quality of love
and witness to our God who loves us all so much, Jesus happened

I suggest it begins for all of us, that's *all* of us - married or not married

- with Ephesians 5:21: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*
“submit to one another” [Slide 6]
how about that for a definition of “love”: submit to one another?
- I checked out that verse in some other translations: [Slide 7]
“put others first” (CEV), “be courteously reverent” (Message)
“be subject to” (Good News, NRSV)
- however I think “submit” says it all
it's a word we might have trouble with these days
'why should I submit to someone else?'
'I am most important!' 'I know best' [Slide 8]

These days our culture screams “do whatever feels good” and “me first”

- submitting, being subject to, putting others first, flies in the face of all that
and is at the basis of our Christian faith:
- we are not the most important, don't always come first
and certainly are not always right and know best
- for some of us it is very hard to admit that
for some of us it is very hard to do that
- but it is the first step in being able to receive the love of God
God who is 101% sure that each and every single one of us is marvellous
- after all we are made in God's image
and we are all loved amazingly by God
- if we are able to recognise that then we are able to love:
love God, love ourselves, love others

Paul goes on in Ephesians 5:22-33 to show how this works for husbands and wives

- now I've had some guys quote these words about husbands being the head
and wives submitting, to say they are in charge, what they say and do goes
- in response I gently draw their attention to verse 25 [Slide 9]
and ask them how much did Jesus love the church?
he gave up his life, was crucified
- that is what it means to 'be the head': that is how they are to love their wife

These days I've sometimes heard arguments about Paul's words being 'out dated'

- that things are different in this age of equality
people have issues with the whole concept of 'headship'
and being the 'boss' and should there be a boss anyway?
- now you can do all sorts of theological study and biblical exposition
on these verses, and people have, and I have read and considered some of it
- and perhaps it simply comes down to this:
wives are to understand and support their husbands
and husbands are to go all out in cherishing their wives

John Stott writes: [Slide 10]

What does it mean to submit? It is to give oneself up for somebody. What does it mean to love? It is to give oneself up for somebody, as Christ gave himself up for the church. Thus submission and love are two aspects of the very same thing, namely, of that selfless self-giving which is the foundation of an enduring and growing marriage.

Love in marriage is a relationship

- it is about balance and reciprocity, you can't have one without the other
husbands do this and wives do that
- and when you do ... the two become one and it is a profound mystery
not $1+1=2$, but $1+1=11!!!$ [Slide 11]
- amazing ... that is the promise of blessing Paul holds out

And it moves out from there

- we are to love others as we love ourselves, to put others first
and where there is a relationship of some closeness
there is a requirement of reciprocity and of mutual respect
- it is the way God has set up the universe ... and it works
we might question, argue, try to figure out why
but it is something we have to accept

When you have a car and the manual says put this much of this grade oil in the engine

- you don't argue a different grade would be better
or a different amount, or not put it in at all
- you can do all the arguing and following your own ideas you want
and what will happen ... ? [Slide 12]
- the engine will seize, or explode ...
that is the way it works

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ

- care for those with whom you have a relationship
respect and honour those you live and work alongside
as Christ loved the church
- that is the way it works

Jesus takes this further, doesn't he always, in our gospel reading

- can you recall some of the outrageous things he says???
- [space for response]
- he starts by telling us to love our enemies and pray for those who hurt us
it seems illogical, counter intuitive, plain dumb ... very
but it makes a huge difference and allows God's kingdom to break through
 - I like this: "Forgive your enemies, it messes with their heads"! [Slide 13]

It is so much more than loving those who love us

- as *The Message* says:
If all you do is love the loveable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that.
- or this saying: "those who deserve love least, need it most" [Slide 14]
we are called, encouraged, prodded, to give our best to everyone, regardless
the good and the bad, the nasty as well as the nice
- we are in short to act like our Father in heaven
it's a tough call, but then as I said at the beginning
love costs, that's what makes it love [Slide 15]

Jesus has paid the cost and as a result we, you, me, absolutely everyone
- can share in the blessing of forgiveness, new beginnings, new life
Jesus has paid the cost and so we have the gift of the Holy Spirit
to help us in loving others as he loves us

And now if you will allow me the small indulgence of one heart-warming story ...

[Slide 16]

A salesman called his wife from a coin-operated phone in a distant city. He finished the conversation, said goodbye and replaced the receiver. As he was walking away the phone rang. He went back and answered it, expecting to be informed of extra charges. But the operator said, "I thought you'd like to know. Just after you hung up, your wife said, 'I love you.'"

Kind of says it all ...

Ah yes, some "homework"

- if you are married, please read Ephesians 5:21-33
and reflect very carefully upon what you read
it's a self-marking test and the answers aren't in the back ... they're in the mirror
- otherwise, I invite you to reflect on Ephesians 5:21
and this week note at least one instance of yourself submitting to the Lord
and of submitting to someone else

Let us pray together the Prayer for the Week (in the Pew News/Newsletter, and on screen)

[Slide 17]

*Lord God,
you have taught us that anything we do without love is worth nothing,
for whoever lives without love is counted dead before you;
send your Holy Spirit, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,
the true bond of peace and of all virtues;
grant this for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ. AMEN*