

Love in Community
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Neil's and Clinton's Leave

You'll be able to download an outline or the full transcript of the sermon on the live page of the Bundy website

Please feel free to use those if they will help you follow along

Most importantly, please keep your bibles open

And make sure that you test everything you hear from me against the Bible.

Over the course of the last three weeks

We've been looking at the topic of community

First we looked at how God made us for community with Him and others

Then we looked at how this community has been broken by our sin

Last week we looked at how we need truth and grace in our relationships

And how Jesus brings both of these to us

And today we will be looking at love in community

Let's pray

All you need is love

Love is all you need

So sang the Beatles in 1967

To the background of the Summer of Love

And Anti-Vietnam war sentiments

It seems like such a simple, universal message

We need love

I don't think any community would disagree with that statement

But I think there's confusion about what love is

For example, I think if you ask any Vietnam War Veteran

They would say that they were treated with anything but love

For fighting in a war that they were conscripted to

Love is a word that is thrown around so much

That many would say that it is obvious what it means

But I think it's the opposite

It's almost devoid of any agreed meaning.

Take for example the referendum for marriage equality a few years ago

On the "yes" side the slogan was a "vote for love"

Implying then that if you voted "no" you were voting for some other lesser reason

Or you were simply "unloving"

This is where the "no" side lost the marketing war

because their slogan was "It's ok to say no?"

But in fact most of the people I know who voted "no"

Voted out of love for others

So it raises the question "what is love?"

I think often love has come to mean "unconditional affirmation"

In an age of social media and an insatiable desire to be validated

We feel loved and validated

When people “like” the things in our life that we share on Facebook or Instagram.
But is that “love”?

Today I want to do three things in the talk

Firstly, from the Bible I want to answer the question “What is love”
And then I want to say we need to be loved by Jesus
And thirdly We need to love like Jesus

What is love?

Baby don't hurt me?

Don't hurt me no more. According to Haddaway.

What's love but a second-hand emotion, cried Tina Turner.

I want to know what love is.

I want you to show me. Said Foreigner.

It must have been love

But it's over now, warbled Roxette.

I grew up in the 80s and 90s

The era of big hair and power ballads about love

And to be honest I think this is where I formed my ideas of love

From Kasey Kasem's Top 40 countdown

And from rom-coms with Meg Ryan or Hugh Grant

And I don't think this was particularly helpful

So I want to encourage you

Don't form your ideas of love from your culture

But go to the starting point of love

And that is God himself.

The apostle John says in 1 John 4 verse 8

⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

The starting point for any definition of love is God.

God is love.

Notice that it's not the other way around - love is God

If your starting point is love

Then you get to decide what love is and then you call that God

And I think there's where the notion of unconditional affirmation

Has come to look something like this

Love is this

This must be God

Love is God

But when you start with God

You must look at God to determine what love looks like

So one of the things we see is that God's love is other centred

But not man-centred

What do I mean by that?

Well, love existed long before God made man

Because there was love between the three persons of the Trinity

The Father loved the Son

The Son loved the Father
The Spirit pointing people to the Son and not himself.
Each person of the Trinity seeking the good of the others
And from this union
The Trinity seeks to bring us into this loving koinonia fellowship
Because Father, Son and Spirit seek our good
Here's one of these verses in John's gospel that shows us this

Chapter 17

²⁴ "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

You see love existed before we did.
If God is love,
Then we would expect image bearers of God
That is us - to reflect the depth and richness of love
Love is a deep and rich subject
CS Lewis wrote a book called the four loves
Looking at four different types of love mentioned in the New Testament

In it he looks at Affection, Friendship, Romantic love
and the most important love he calls charity.

I want to focus on the love Lewis calls charity.
The Greek word in the New Testament is agape

Agape is the dominant word used for love in the New Testament
And it appears many times
Agape love is self-sacrificial, other centred love.
Agape looks at what is good for the other and is determined to do that good
Agape love describes how God loves us
But also how we love God and each other

And the Bible is clear that the greatest expression of agape love
Is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Here is the apostle John in 1 John 4
⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And here is the apostle Paul describing how the cross of Christ
Is God's expression of love to unlovely and unworthy sinners - us
Romans 5 verse 7

⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us

The cross is the model of how a husband should love his wife
Ephesians 5 verse 25

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

I want to know what love is

I want you to show me

And God says, I did:

Look at the cross and you will understand my love for you

As we look at the cross in more detail, let me provide a working definition of love

Love is:

A determination to do what is good for the other at the cost to self

Love is:

A determination to do what is good for the other at the cost to self

Let's have a look at our second point as we unpack this definition of love

By looking at the love of Jesus shown to us on the cross

Here's the second point

We need to be loved by Jesus

The context of John 13

Is the night before Jesus' death

During this time

As he is gathered with his 12 disciples

Jesus has a last meal

A last time of teaching, fellowship and prayer

Later that evening

Judas, one of His disciples will betray him

Peter, another will deny him

And the rest will abandon him

Even knowing how they will treat him

Jesus knows that in a matter of hours

When he dies on the cross

He will show them the fulness of His love for them

And so in this final time with his disciples

He is helping them understand what the cross is all about

Chapter 13

Verse 1

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

And the end spoken off here is not what Jesus does next.

The end refers to the cross

His death for many

But what Jesus is about to do next

Shows his disciples the type of love the cross is all about

Jesus stoops down to wash the disciples' feet

One by one
It must have been incredibly shocking and awkward

Foot-washing was the work of a lowly servant in the house
Because feet in sandals
Were exposed to dirty, dusty, smelly roads,
Foot washing was unthinkable for someone in a position of authority
Like a Rabbi, let alone Jesus who they considered their Master, their Lord

This act of love
Was an act of humble, other-centred service
It would still be shocking today
Can you imagine the President of the United States
Stopping down to wash your feet if you had dinner at the White House?

This unthinkable act of love by Jesus
Is only pointing to an even more unthinkable act of love

This is how the apostle Paul speaks of what Jesus did on the cross
Philippians 2 verse 7
He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And
being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of
death, even death on a cross.

We're so used to hearing of people in authority abusing power
Using that authority to their own advantage
And often at the expense of others
Whether that be luxury watches
Or secret deals with suppliers
Or scapegoating blame onto others

But the cross is the very opposite of this
It is power expressed in humility
It is love expressed in service
For the good of the other at the cost to self
This is the love of Jesus

Peter is uncomfortable with this love
And he expresses what everyone is thinking

John 13 verse 6
⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered
him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will
understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I
do not wash you, you have no share with me."

Again, Jesus is talking about the cross.
He's saying that if you want to be accepted by God
You must be washed clean.
Your sin needs to be dealt with
And the only way to have your sin dealt with

Is through the cross of Christ

The cross points to our problem

Sin is our problem

Our rejection of God is our problem

Our sin means each of us deserve God's judgement of death

Eternal separation from God

But God's love meant that he sent Jesus to be a Saviour and a Sacrifice

A Saviour who could save us from sin and death

A Sacrifice who could die in our place

God's love responds to our greatest need

And our greatest need is a solution to our sin

So we need the cross

Do you think love is making someone happy?

Or doing what is good for them?

They're not the same thing are they?

You see what Peter wanted from Jesus was a military king for the Jews

Someone stronger than the Romans

He wanted power not weakness

He had no room for a suffering servant King like Jesus

Peter had no room for a cross

Peter was ready to draw his sword and fight for power

But what Jesus knew about Peter was that behind bravado

Was the heart of a coward

And even deeper still was the heart of a sinner

Jesus looked past what Peter wanted

And gave Peter what he needed

A Saviour on a cross

Who would wash him clean of his sin

And forgive him of his guilt

You might pray and ask God for all sorts of things you want as proof of love

But I want you to know that God loves you so much

That He has already responded to your greatest need

He provided His Son,

your Saviour,

on a cross,

for your sin

Love involves a cost to self

In fact, love involves costly substitution

Jesus died on the cross

So we would not die for our sin

John 3 verse 16

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life

The apostle John refers to Jesus' death as a propitiation

A propitiation is a sacrifice that turns God's anger at sin away
Away from us and towards the sacrifice – in this case Jesus
In other words Jesus is our substitute, our sacrifice
One dies so that many do not die

Every time you read a book or watch a film
Where one of the main characters die
In a moment of loving sacrifice to save many
This is an echo of the cross
Whether this is Aslan from the Chronicles of Narnia
Or the T-1000 cyborg from Terminator 2
Or Tony Stark from Avengers Endgame
Great love always involves costly substitution
It is true of Jesus' love and it is true of our love
This coming Wednesday is Remembrance day
And you should set aside time to remember
Remember the loving sacrifice of so many who gave their lives in wars for our good
Now in the shrine of remembrance
On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month
A beam of light shines on a plaque in the middle of the shrine
And the words read "Greater love hath no man"
This of course is taken from the gospel of John

Chapter 15 where Jesus says
¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.
When telling his disciples to love one another
He spoke about his love on the cross for them
The shrine of remembrance is considered one of the most sacred places in Melbourne
But at the heart of the shrine
Is an echo of the cross

Love is determination and not just emotion.
Let me ask you?
Do you have to *feel* in love in order to love?
That is what many people think
In fact, it's often thought that unless you are true to your feelings
You are *not* being loving
I want to show you that the opposite is true
Sometimes you have to do the very opposite of what you feel in order to love

On the night before Jesus died
Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane
He asked God that the cup of suffering might be taken away from him
In other words, Jesus didn't want to suffer the excruciating agony of the cross
Imagine experiencing the judgement that billions of sinners deserve
Who could blame Jesus if he wanted another way to save the world.

I want you to notice what Jesus was feeling
A few verses earlier
Mark 14 verse 33

And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

What is Jesus feeling?

Distress

Troubled

Sorrowful

He is incredibly stressed

One gospel account tells us that his sweat was like drops of blood

Jesus is churning up inside

He's about to be betrayed, denied and abandoned by his closest friends

He will experience the sin and judgement of the world

And die a horrific and humiliating death on a cross

Of course, Jesus is not feeling great about it

When I was growing up

I used to think that it was easy for Jesus to die on the cross for me

I mean he loved after all me didn't he

And when you love someone

It's easy isn't it

How wrong I was

About Jesus

And about love

A few years ago

The Pixar movie Inside Out was released

And it was the story about a girl

Who has a very happy life

Until she has to move across the country

And there is another story going on inside her

There are two emotions battling to control her

There's joy who had control of her for most of her life

And now sadness is also starting to having more control over her

And basically the message of the movie

Is that it's okay for joy and sadness to be in control of your emotions

Life is often bittersweet

And I think the movie did at least one good thing

And that was to tell us that life isn't just about being happy

But the problem with the movie is that it affirmed the message

That our society holds onto

You are controlled by your emotions

You are what you feel

Whether that is happiness, sadness, grief, anger, etc.

What the movie failed to mention is your will.

God gave you not only emotions

He gave you a will

Separate to your emotions

A will to reason and to act on the basis of love

Regardless of what your emotions say

I want you to hear this
Especially if you're younger
You have been told that you are the sum total of your feelings
And you are so so much more than this
God made you more than your emotions
He gave you a will as well
So that you don't need to be a slave to your emotions

I want you to see what Jesus did with his emotions
When he prayed that night in the garden
He said to God His Father
"Yet not what I will, but what you will"
Jesus submitted his emotions to his will
And he submitted his will to His Father's will
All for the sake of loving a world that hated him
After praying this,
Jesus walked the path that led to the cross
Was Jesus true to his feelings
No he wasn't and I will be forever grateful
Was Jesus loving
Yes He was,
He loved us so much that he gave his life for us.

We need to be loved by Jesus through the cross

"If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."
Let me ask you?
Have you received the love of Jesus?
There is a hunger in our community for love
A love that is deep and satisfying
A love that seeks the good of others
Even at great cost to self
A love that is loyal and never fails
A love that sees you at your worst
But never stops giving you its best
That love is found only in Jesus

Here are the words of one of my favourite hymns

*My song is love unknown
My saviour's love to me
Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be
O who am I, that for my sake
My Lord should take frail flesh and die*

If you want to experience that love
You must make room for the cross in your life
It's the simplest and the hardest thing to do
Simple because you don't need to bring anything to a relationship with Jesus
Other than your sin
All you have to do is to trust Jesus
Believe in Him.

You don't need to perform or to pretend to Jesus

But hard because you have to swallow your pride
And admit that you need him to serve you
We need to be loved by Jesus

Here's my final point

We need to love *like* Jesus

I want to speak specifically now to those of you who confess to following Jesus
Because Jesus commands you to love.

A necessary response to Jesus' love is to love others as we have been loved by Jesus
John 13 verse 14

¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Jesus goes onto say in verse 34

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³

The old commandment was "love your neighbour as you love yourself"
But this new commandment comes with a deeper experience of God's love on the cross
Because not only did Jesus love His neighbour
But on the cross, Jesus loved his enemies.
The cross forms the basis of our love for others

1 John 4 verse 10

God loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

John said a few verses earlier that if we do not love like this
We show that we do not know God
Because if you truly know the love of the cross
You will want to show that same love to others

There is no room for self-centred consumerism in the gospel of Jesus
You are not just a consumer of love
You are to be a practitioner of love

Let me give you an example

COVID-19 has brought out the best and the worst in our community
Do you remember that one of the worst behaviours
Was the hoarding of toilet paper and pasta
That's a self-centred, consumer attitude
As long as me and my household are fine
Who cares about anyone else
And so people were stockpiling hundreds of toilet rolls in their houses
Pensioners were the most affected by this
Because they could not compete with people buying bulk packs of toilet paper

If there were followers of Jesus amongst the stockpilers

Shame on us

Shame on us

This is what 1 John 3 verse 16 says:

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

One of the best things I have seen during the pandemic

Is seeing your generosity

We established a Hardship Fund this year

For people in very difficult circumstances due to the pandemic

Because they lost jobs or because of their visas

They did not qualify for Job Keeper

A significant amount of money has been given to the Hardship Fund

And that against the backdrop that a number of you are facing uncertainty of your own jobs

In the last month alone, \$14,000 alone was given to the Fund

And more than half of the funds given this year has already been distributed

To help people with rent, groceries and utilities.

The same can be said for the way in which you have responded to the Food Bank

For the international students at LaTrobe Uni.

But it's not just loving by giving money and food.

It's also loving like Christ by giving your time.

We were encouraged last month to hear from one of our deacons

Who has spent much of this year visiting families in the hardest situations

Helping them to access the Hardship Fund

But what got me was how she grieves with these families

Sometimes just sitting on the floor with them in their sadness

And praying with them and pointing them to Jesus

That is loving like Jesus

Like the cross not just with words, but also with deeds.

Loving like Jesus means obeying Jesus

Jesus loved God His Father by obeying His Father's commands

If we are to love like Jesus we too will obey Jesus' commands

Jesus says in John 15

If you keep my commands you will remain in my love

We normally think that love is the freedom to pursue what we want

But the bible says that true freedom is to pursue the obedience of Jesus

If you want to experience life to the full then trusting and obeying Jesus is a priority

We need to obey Jesus in relation to what he says

About money

About speech

About relationships

Loving like Jesus means we are quick to listen and slow to speak

Jesus had a distinct advantage
Because he knew what was in a man's heart
We don't so we need to learn to listen
Most of us are good at talking and not listening
In fact some of us are good at interrupting others
Because we have so much to say
This is not loving
When you're a good talker it doesn't mean that you are a good listener
In fact, all of us need to work at active listening.
And the way I describe active listening when I do marriage preparation with couples
Is informing your love
How can you love someone unless you understand them?
How can you understand them unless you listen to them?
Then you can inform your love to love them better
To listen better
Learn how to ask questions
Learn how to listen to those answers
So you can ask more questions
When I listen to people in conversation
Sometimes I am saying short prayers to God to help me understand
I'm also praying for relevant Bible passages to share with them
I'm also thinking of another question to help them share some more
If I'm too busy thinking of what I want to say
Then all those opportunities to love are lost.
Many years ago, one of my ministry mentors
Taught me that one of the most loving things you can do for someone is let them be heard.

Loving like Jesus means forgiving as Jesus forgave us

We are not to be people who bear grudges
We are not to be people who harbour bitterness and resentment
We are to be people who love our enemies
People who bless and pray for those who persecute us
Like the Father in the story of the lost son in Luke 15
We are to be ready and willing to forgive
The moment someone says they are sorry
This is one of the hardest things to do
But if we struggle with this we need to keep looking at the cross
To see how Jesus forgave us
And then we need to entrust ourselves to God
When we obey this command to forgive others

Loving like Jesus means sharing the message of Jesus

In 2 Corinthians 5 The apostle Paul says that the love of Christ compelled him
That one died for all and therefore all died
And it was this love that drove Paul to share with others
What he calls the message of reconciliation
That sinners can be reconciled with God
So greater than our fear of not knowing what to say
Or our fear of awkwardness or rejection
Is the love of Christ
The most loving thing that we can do for our community who don't know Jesus

Is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ

Loving like Jesus means meeting together

Hebrews 10 verse 24 says

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

It has been a long time since we've been able to do that as a large gathering on Sundays
And we are still waiting for permission to do that
But with the easing of restrictions in gathering outdoors and in homes
Can I encourage you not to give up meeting?

Last weekend

Our family were able to catch up at Bundoora Park with another family after the service

And on Cup Day we saw another household from Bundy

It's been 8 months since we've seen these brothers and sisters in person

And it was so good to see them

Even though we can't meet as a large gathering

Use smaller gatherings to stir up one another to love and good works

Invite someone to watch the livestream with you

Then have lunch with them

I know of at least one growth group who were not more than 10 people

So they were able to meet outside for a social gathering this week

It can be easy to give up because you feel frustrated

Or maybe you feel that it will be awkward

But commit those feelings to God in prayer

And then meet

When we love like Jesus, the world will see it

That's what Jesus said, By this everyone will know that you are my disciples

If you love one another

Because of COVID-19

We missed the death of one of our great Australians

Dr Catherine Hamlin

Who died in March in Ethiopia

She and her husband Reg

Both committed followers of Jesus

Left Sydney for a planned trip of 3 years to Ethiopia

Catherine Hamlin died 60 years later

Having established a Fistula Hospital in Addis Abbaba

And helping an estimated 60,000 women

In our country with good medical care

We can avoid obstructed labours

But in other countries, fistulas leave women with incontinence

Pain, discomfort, the risk of infection and social isolation

Obstetric fistulas are the result of poverty

And most women in the world who suffer from these fistulas

Are rejected or forgotten

But not to Jesus

And not to Catherine and Reg Hamlin

And over the years
People recognised their love
Catherine Hamlin was visited by Prince Charles and Princess Mary
She was Interviewed on Oprah
And was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Price
A book has been written about her called The Hospital by the River
Hanging on the wall of the Hospital though is Catherine and Reg's inspiration
A verse from the bible
Matthew chapter 25 verse 40
Where Jesus said,
What you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine
You did for me

This is the love our community needs