

Community – Evening Congregation Camp 2021

Love in Community

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

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

Most importantly, please keep your bibles open

Over the course of the weekend

We've been looking at the topic of community

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

And how this community has been broken by our sin

Yesterday we looked at how we need truth and grace in our relationships

And how Jesus brings both of these to us

And this evening we will be looking at how essential love is in our community

Let's pray

Let me do a quick quiz

Love is:

1. A strong feeling for someone
2. Doing something good for someone
3. Something that happens to you
4. Making someone happy

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 drafted into without any choice

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 when we are validated
When people “like” the things in our life that we share on Facebook or Instagram.
When people agree with our choices
But is that really “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?

If you want to know love,
You go to the starting point of love
And that is God himself.

The apostle John says in 1 John 4 verse 8
Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

God is love.
So the starting point for any definition of love is God.
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 demonstration of love to unlovely and unworthy sinners - namely us

Romans 5 verse 7

⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

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

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

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

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

That is how God loved us through the cross of Christ

Therefore this is the answer to the question

What is love?

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 chapter 13 is this
It's the night before Jesus' death
Jesus is gathered with his 12 disciples for a last meal
A final 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 in his hour of need
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

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go 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 made himself nothing by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to 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
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, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part 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 that you want
And these are things you might even demand 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

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.

The apostle John refers to Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice
A sacrifice that turns God's anger at sin away
Away from us and towards the sacrifice – 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 (spoiler alert)
Great love always involves costly substitution
It is true of Jesus' love and it is true of our love

Every November, Remembrance day
Is a day set aside to remember the loving sacrifice of so many
who gave their lives in wars for our good

Now at the shrine of remembrance in Melbourne
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: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

When telling his disciples to love one another
Jesus 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 love of Christ shown on 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

³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

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
You have been told for years 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 both 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. Accept His love
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 you to hear me out for a moment
The kind of community you long for
The kind of community that the world needs
Is the community that loves like Jesus
Imagine a community, full of people who demonstrate the humble,
sacrificial, other centred love of Jesus

Who wouldn't want to be in a community like that?

And Jesus says this is a necessary response of those who have been loved by Jesus
John 13 verse 14

¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Jesus goes onto say in verse 34

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

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

¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since 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
This is what 1 John 3 verse 16 says:

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. . ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

One of the best things I have seen during the pandemic

Is seeing your generosity
We established a Hardship Fund last 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
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 students at LaTrobe Uni.

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

In the months ahead,
As we come out of lockdown
There will be lots of talk of freedom
The freedom to travel, to shop, to socialise
When and where we please
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
And that is a life of loving Jesus and being loved by Him
Then trusting and obeying Jesus is a priority
We need to obey Jesus in relation to what he says
About money
About speech
About sex
About the use of our time
About relationships

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

We have been starved of face-to-face relationships
And to be honest,
We are going to need to learn how to relate with one another again
Listening is key to this

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
And that requires work,
because the natural thing to do might just be to dump whatever you want to say on them
Be quick to listen instead

Loving like Jesus means forgiving as Jesus forgave us

In a cancel culture which justifies hatred
And the trolling and scorn of those who do not agree with us
We are to be people who love our enemies
We are not to be people who bear grudges
We are not to be people who harbour bitterness and resentment
We are told to 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 someone
The moment they say 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
That points them to the cross of Christ

Loving like Jesus means meeting together

Hebrews 10 verse 24 says

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

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 there is now a roadmap to easing of restrictions
There will be more opportunities to meet with one another
Outdoors and in smaller groups
Take up these opportunities
I know you are tired
I know some of you are scared

But don't give up
As you have been loved by Jesus
Seek opportunities to love others and to encourage them

And the challenge of this has been made more complicated by
Where people stand on vaccination
So to help you in this
We are going to spend some time on zoom after the service
To talk through this
So please feel free to join us after the service.

What is love?
A determination to do what is good for the other at the cost to self
We have been loved by Jesus on the cross
We need to love like Jesus
When we love like Jesus, the world will see it and take notice

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 Prize
A book has been written about her called The Hospital by the River
Hanging on the wall of the Hospital 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