

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

15th July 2018

1 John 4:7-21

Spirit... may we be brought to life... May we find the colour and image and word and truth... that sets us free... and brings new breath into our community... So be it... Amen

My friends... let us love one another... because love is from God...

And really, that's it for this morning... Away and do that... Sermon over... Seriously... Let us go and love one another... because quite simply... love is from God...

I'll sit down right now...

Well... maybe you'll allow me a second or two more... because really that's all it takes for the gospel to be preached... a second or two simply to reaffirm in you... everyone who loves... is born of God... and knows God... There you are... Everyone who loves... is born of God... and knows God... And really... that *is* it for today... Now I'll sit down...

Okay... maybe one more thing... Whoever does not love... does not know God... If you don't love... you've squeezed God out... That's all there is to say... Now I'm definitely going to sit down...

And just to sum it up... God is love...

Have you ever wondered how many wars have been fought over that?... And how many terrible things have we done in God's name and still we claim... God is love?... How many people go hungry... and are separated from their families... and live in fear... and face prejudice... because we are gay or straight or immigrant or black or white or whatever combination of what our culture says is atypical at any particular time... in the same sentence claim God is love...

Really we ought to sit down quicker perhaps... before we start trying to justify our actions and what we do towards others... in the name of this God... this God who is love... There

is no further explanation we can ever hope to make about our faith than that... God is love...

Yet it feels very little when you say it... God is love...

But it is a affirmation of an inclusive... open... vision of the kind of relationships in which we live with one another... This is the faith:... where love is... God is there... where love is absent... God is absent too... Forget any other words ever heard about faith... or spoken in faith... Draw a line through them all... and start again... God is love...

And where communities love each other... that strong giving-of-self... looking-for-nothing-in-return love... then God is present...

Where our communities or churches are divided... there God is absent... no matter how sound the doctrine... nor poetic the description... or beautiful the creed...

But let's grow that idea... let's imagine... beyond John's world-view when he wrote this letter... let's dare our faith... to live beyond the bounds of the church... and apply it to every community... each Islamic... Hindu... Sikh... or entirely secular group... wherever there is love... there will be God... for God is love...

It is deceptively simple... So why have we chosen to claim some exclusivity for our Christian faith... and why are nations today moving more and more towards isolationist... values... tariffs... going it alone... Why do we accept... and adopt the fear or arrogance... that leads us to that...

The issue with love is you cannot love... without entering into a relationship with another person... Love isn't isolationist... We can only make God known... not simply by *speaking* about God... We can only make God known... by loving another...

There will be one day... when words about God will run out... and the creeds will turn to dust... and doctrine left unsaid... for words are inadequate in describing faith... or what we are as a church... a community... humanity... because love is not something to be talked about... but something to be entered into... wildly and generously...

Only in loving... can God be known... for God... IS... love... God doesn't need a creed... a denomination... a church... God is not Christian... God is not a statement or a holy book or a piece of bread or a bowl of water for Matthew... or even some old man in the sky sporting a long white beard... None of that is God... God is love... and when we love... when we give of ourselves for another's need... when we don't look for anything in return... we reveal God... that actual act of loving... is God...

Love is not the church... Love is not Christianity... Love is not a mission statement... or a gift you get when you join the church... Love is not evidence of God's existence... Love doesn't even point us to God... It really is more basic than that... Love is God...

So whoever loves... knows God... because what we have done in that moment of loving... is meet God... God doesn't need to be out there directing the flow of the traffic in the universe... God needs people to love... God isn't some being manoeuvring the pieces of our lives like some great chess player... as Hardy described God in Tess of the d'Urbervilles... "The president of the immortals had finished his game with Tess"... nor is God out there setting the planets straight as Isaac Newton needed when his laws of motion didn't quite work out... God is much closer to home...

So when we sit on the edge of our seats waiting for those 12 young footballers to come out of the cave... under the self-giving care of a team of 90 divers and medics and technicians... or watch as families are divided from each other as they cross a border... which one reveals God...

As a church we can say all we like... and we can say much... and be full of intent... and beautifully describe what we believe... but rarely will that reveal God...

And nor should we even go and sit down... because that will rarely reveal God...

Let us love one another... because love is from God... Let us challenge the world... shape our community... move towards our neighbour... in love... for everyone who loves... is born of God... and knows God... Whoever does not love... cannot know God... for God... is... love...

This alone is our faith... giving of self for another... as our deepest story of salvation reveals... that looks for nothing in return... as our particular story of Jesus reveals... This is love... and God is that love... that surely is why we can say God is in us all... because we all have the capacity to love... to know God... for God is love...

So... far too many words this morning... Far too many words most Sundays... Let's leave it with three words... to shape us and guide us and give us vision and intent... and they will be the first words and the last words... and they are the last words this morning...

God is love...