

1 John 4.7-12: GOD LOVES YOU

[Chelmsford 12 February 2012]

Valentine's Day is almost upon us – just two more days to go.
Have you bought a card? Have you written your greeting?
If you are desperate for inspiration you could do worse than go to
www.stvalentinesday.org. For instance:-

There are three steps to happiness, declares one lover

1. *You*
2. *Me*
3. *Our hearts*
4. *Eternity*

I will love you till my heart stops beating

OR; *Roses are red, violets are blue
Sugar is sweet, and so are you!
But the roses have wilted and the violets are dead
The sugar bowl is empty and so is your head
I love*

OR, more romantically
*I love you 100 times
I miss you 2000 times
I want to be with you always and forever!!
I love you 1 in a million times of each day
I want to make you mine
I love you for you and you only.....
YUK – on reflection I don't think much of that greeting*

But to be serious, whether or not we scribble ditties to our amorata on Valentine's Day, the reality is that all of us want to be loved. To quote from the introduction to our Looking for Love workbook: "*We have all been created with a deep desire to be loved and a longing to have that desire fulfilled*"

The Good News is that there is love to be found
For God loves us – he loves each one of us – indeed, he loves you as if you were the one only there were to be loved.

My sermon this morning is based upon what is arguably the greatest statement in the Bible - "**God is Love**" declares John (1 John 4.8).
Whatever else we can say about God, the most wonderful thing we can say and indeed know is that "**God is love**".

But what do we mean when we say that "**God is love**"?
This morning I want to touch on five aspects

1. GOD'S LOVE IS ACTIVE

In the first place, we mean that God is active in his loving.

The statement "**God is love**" is not just referring to a moral quality, but rather to an **action** - or perhaps better a series of actions. I.e. To say that "**God is love**" is not just to say that he is a loving person, but rather that he puts love into action.

Indeed, precisely because "**God is love**", all his actions are loving.

We see God's love in action in the creation of the universe.

Why did God create a world which was to bring to him nothing but trouble?

The answer is that God created the world because creation is essential to the very nature of God.

If "**God is love**", then it means that God cannot exist in lonely isolation.

Love, to be love, must have someone to love.

Most clearly, however, we see God's love in action in the sending of Jesus to be our Saviour. So John writes: "**God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world**" (v9)

The coming of Jesus into our world is a sign not just that "**God is love**", but that God loves his world - indeed, God loves us. The coming of Jesus is love in action.

From all eternity God has been "**love**" - but in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we see that love for us in action.

The love of God, seen so clearly in Jesus, may be likened to the rings which appear on the cut face of a log - those rings are but the visible cross-section of lines that run right up the trunk, hidden from view by the bark.

So the cross of Jesus is the visible appearance in this world of love that stretches back beyond our vision into the depths of eternity.

"**God is love**". Precisely because he is love, he puts his love into action.

In this sense *the love of a man for a woman is a pale reflection of God's love for us.*

Because when a man loves a woman, he doesn't simply feel 'gooey' inside - he does something about it. He sends a Valentine card - he buys flowers - he gives a kiss.

Human love, if it has any meaning, is always active.

Likewise God's love is active too.

2. GOD'S LOVE IS PRO-ACTIVE

But God's love is more than merely active. It is also pro-active.

Precisely because "**God is love**", he takes the initiative in loving us.

God does not wait for us to love him. God is pro-active in his loving.

The French have a proverb: "*In love there is always one who kisses and one who offers the cheek*". In terms of this proverb, we can say that God is the one who kisses

- he does not meekly offer the cheek in response to our desire to kiss him, as it were...

His love is not re-active, but rather proactive.

This is what John is meaning when he goes on to describe God's love in v10:

"This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us..."

When it comes to love between a man and a woman, *it's always meant to be the man who does the running*. We expect a man to woo a woman, and not vice versa.

Strictly speaking, it's not the done thing for a woman to send a Valentine's Card to a man. Rather it is for us men to say "*Be my Valentine*".

Likewise it is only in a leap year that a woman allowed to propose marriage to a man. Strictly speaking, she should be patient and wait for the man to produce the ring.

But when it comes to love between God and us, it is God who does the running. God doesn't wait for us to love him. Rather, he takes the initiative.

That's all the more amazing when you think about it the kind of people we are.

For in spite of what your girl-friend or boy-friend might say about you, *there is nothing inherently attractive about people like us*.

For to use religious jargon, when God first loved us, we were all "**sinners**" - i.e. all of us, without exception, were intent on going our way, rather than God's way.

Indeed, through our own selfishness & stupidity we had messed not only our lives, but also the lives of others.

And yet God took the initiative in loving us.

The people to whom John was writing were people living in a culture dominated by Greek philosophy - according to the Greek philosophers of that day love for the unlovable was just not on.

The Greek philosopher, *Aristotle*, once said: "*Only he who is deserving of love can be loved*". Similarly Plato once said: "*Love is for the lovely*"

But the fact of God's love should surely continue to amaze us, and all the more so in that it is pro-active.

Precisely because "**God is love**", you might imagine God politely responding to our love by offering us his cheek - but to care for us when we couldn't care two hoots for him, to love us when we were in fact defying his laws and his ways, that is incredible.

The extraordinary nature of God's love becomes clear when we realise the extent to which God loves us.

For God didn't send a cheap Valentine's card - he didn't offer a quick peck on the cheek. He has loved us extravagantly

3. GOD'S LOVE IS EXTRAVAGANT

Listen again to John. "**God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world**" (v9)

John goes on to repeat the thought: "**he loved us and sent his Son**" (v10)

God's love is extravagant love. Let me illustrate with a story:

A minister was talking to a couple who were having difficulties in their marriage. There was much bitterness & pain, coupled with an acute lack of understanding.

At one point in the exchange the husband spoke up in obvious exasperation: "I've given you everything", he said to his wife. "I've given you a new home, a new car and all the clothes you can wear. I've given you....."

And he went on to list all kinds of things. When he had ended, the wife said sadly: "That much is true, John. You have given me everything... but yourself"

By contrast, **God has given his very self.**

God's love knows no bounds. God has loved us with an extravagance which is way beyond our deserving. For he sent his Son to die on the Cross for you and me

Did you know that it is difficult to find a verse in the NT that speaks about God's love without also speaking in the same verse or in the immediate context about God's gift of his Son at Calvary? E.g.

- In Jn 3 we read: "**As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. for God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son**" (Jn 3.14-16)
- Similarly John in the very first chapter of the Book of Revelation exclaims: "**He loves us, and by his sacrifice death he has freed us from our sins**"
- Here in 1 Jn 4.10 he writes: "**This is what love is; it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven**"

Augustine called *the cross "a pulpit"* from which Jesus preached God's love to the world. God has gone over the top in loving us.

He has sent his Son to die for us on a Cross. God's love is extravagant love. Precisely because of its extravagance, we can go on to say.

4. GOD'S LOVE IS LIFE-CHANGING

For many people being in love is a life-changing experience.

It can be life-changing in the sense that all of a sudden one finds oneself valued and affirmed in the way that perhaps one has never been valued or affirmed before.

God's love is life-changing in the sense that we are able to put our past behind us, and walk forward into a new future - a new life - with him.

Listen again to John in v10 of 1 Jn 4: "**God...loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven**"

To say that "**God is love**" does not mean that God loves us through rose-coloured spectacles. God's love does not stop him from seeing straight.

God is not to be likened to a young man so infatuated with his beloved that he fails to see that she has got a triple chin, a double squint, and greasy hair.

God may love us, but he is not infatuated with us.

When he loves us, he is not blind to our faults.

Furthermore, to say that "**God is love**" does not mean to say that God is prepared to put up with our faults. In this respect God's love is different from then the kind of

love many of us experience in marriage.

For those of us who are married and who have got beyond the honeymoon period of our marriage, we are no doubt conscious that our beloved is not always perfect, but that doesn't mean to say we stop loving them. Instead, because of our love for them we are prepared to overlook their occasional imperfections.

But God doesn't overlook our imperfections/faults/sins. He deals with them.

"God... sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven"

God forgives us, not by turning a blind eye to our sin, nor by just forgetting our past failures - rather, he forgives by sending Jesus to die on a Cross.

Yes, it is at the cost of the death of Jesus that our sins are forgiven.

Jesus has become **"the atoning sacrifice for our sins"** (NRSV).

In the words of 1 John 1.7 **"the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin"**.

In a way which defies our understanding, Jesus paid the price for our sin.

Jesus, the good shepherd, laid down his life for his sheep, that they might have life.

Yes, once our sins are forgiven and our past is forgiven, we discover that we are able to walk into a new future, into a new life.

Listen again to John: **"God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him"**.

In every sense of the word, God's love is life-changing!

5. GOD'S LOVE IS ALL-INCLUSIVE

Human love tends to be limited and exclusive.

When you and I send a Valentines card, we normally send only one - or maybe if we have got real energy we might send two - but nobody in their right mind would ever dream of sending Valentines cards to every woman around

But God's love is all-inclusive - it is universal.

As John writes in v14: **"the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world"**

Jn 3.16: **"God so loved the world..."**

To say that **"God is love"** is to say that he loves us all - indeed, strange to say, he loves even you and me. This is the good news Christians have to share.

The love of God that is active, pro-active, extravagant, and life-changing, is directed to you and to me.

GOD'S LOVE DEMANDS A RESPONSE

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BUT for this love to be complete, we need to respond to his love.

God has done all the running - ***he now awaits your response***

God is love - he loves you - has sent his Son for you - he offers you forgiveness for all your past failures - he offers you a new beginning - a new life which begins in the here and now and goes right through into eternity.

For God's sake, for your sake, indeed for heaven's sake, don't spurn the love of God!

[1 Jn 4.7-12]