

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

30th January 2022 – Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

1 Corinthians 13:1-8a, 13

LOVING TOGETHER

To start off today, we are going to hear a quote from former British Prime Minister, Hugh Grant, best said by the man himself (opening intro. to *Love Actually*). That scene comes from the opening of the 2003 romantic comedy, *Love Actually*, and it's a good reminder of the pureness, the innocence, the happiness, of this somewhat undefinable feeling and action which we call 'love'. Love. It makes the world go round. Money can't buy it. It's all you need. If you're a fan of country music songs you always seem to be losing it. Have a quick think, what songs can you come up with that have love in the title? It is an inexhaustible list, isn't it? I remember when I was about 8-10 years old, I had a big revelation one day listening to the radio; all the songs on there were about love! I struggled to find a song, apart from children's songs, which wasn't based on love.

Love is such a core part of our lives, and our world. We need it, we all seek it in some way; whether it is love with a partner, with family, with friends, or even with our pets. It's central to our meaning in life. But it is hard to define, predict, or just put into a box. Young people might sometimes ask, 'how will I know when I am in love?'. We can all ask: why do I love this person and not that person? How is that sometimes someone can know straight away they are in love with that person? Why, even in cases when love has been very intense and even long lasting, can it sometimes end? A lot has been studied, said, and written about these types of questions, but still the answers aren't always there.

Also, not at all surprisingly, a lot is said about love in all its forms in the Bible, which is essentially a love story about God and His people. But of the apparently over 800 times the word love is mentioned there, according to a Google search, one of the best known is the reading we have today from 1st Corinthians 13. I would guess that if you were to ask a pastor what is

the most common text couples request for their wedding, most would say that well over half want these words here. They are words which have come to be seen as describing the kind of romantic love which starry eyed couples want to believe will define their lifelong relationship.

But like we've done for the last two weeks while we've been looking at Paul's words to the Corinthians, let's put these words back into context. We've talked before about how the Christians in Corinth seem to have been fighting over who was more important, who had the greater spiritual gifts, who should have the biggest say in their community. Paul dealt with this by telling them in chapter 12 first of all that everyone has been gifted to serve, and then that all gifts are equal. Now, to top it off, he tells them very plainly that it doesn't matter what gifts we have, or what we do, if they are done without love then they are nothing.

Let's look first of all at what is written in verses 1-3. Paul lists some of those spiritual gifts which he talked about in chapter 12; speaking other languages, prophesying, even having faith that moves mountains. He adds in acts like giving away all we own, even giving up our lives. Regarding all of these gifts and acts, no matter how holy and right they might seem, they are nothing without love. Our love, which is a reflection of God's love (more on that later), is what makes these acts what they are. We can relate this to our lives and experiences. Think about the difference between someone doing something for you because they want your praise, or they want to look good in front of others, and them doing it for you out of love. Which is more meaningful? Which is more lasting? Which would you prefer? Would you rather empty acts or gifts which really mean nothing, or the true service of someone who cares about you and puts you and your needs first? The same applies to what we do and how we act regarding our Christian faith; the words we say, the things we do, the holy attitude we try to show, all are nothing if they are not a reflection and response to the love we receive from God. Everything is nothing without love.

And then, the very well known and popular bit of this chapter, verse 4 to the beginning of verse 8. It is hard to give a definition of love, so instead here we have a description. Not

just here but throughout the Bible love is not just a word, or a concept, or a feeling, it is an action. If you look at the words used here to describe love, it comes out in how we think, in how we speak, in how we act. Love does what is best for the other person. It puts the needs of others first. It is happy when the other person is happy. What are words for love we can pull out from here? Love is totally forgiving, selfless, truthful, generous, honest. When we look at this definition of love, we can see God's love for us. We can see how God loves and cares for us each day. We can see how God gave Jesus to die for us. We can see the life that Jesus lived, the way he treated and related to people, even giving up His life for us, we can see that all reflected in these words; in a way these words are a summary of the Gospels. This description of love reminds us that God is love.

In this third of our three-part series on Living Together, particularly as a Christian community, we learn that it is all about love. Both our actions individually, and as a community, are nothing without love. Have a look at these words and consider how you are in them. A part of love is not applying them to others, and thinking how they should change, but applying them to yourselves. In your life, with those closest to you, how do you go being kind and patient, not quick tempered, always being supportive? In your relationships with other family, friends, work colleagues, neighbours, are you loyal, not selfish, rejoicing in others success or good fortune? And, in your Christian community, or your Church family, are you supportive, forgiving, not proud, trusting? Have a look at these words. Scan them through your relationships on all levels. Where are you able to act in these ways? Where do you struggle with some of these aspects of love?

To look at ourselves like that can be challenging, can't it? We know that we do ok, but we know also that there are plenty of areas, plenty of relationships, which could do with improvement. As well as telling us in verse 8 that 'love never fails', in verse 13 Paul tells us that the big three for us are 'faith, hope and love', but that the greatest of these is love. Love is important, love does make the world go round. Love is the meaning of life. Not, thankfully,

our love, but God's love. God's love is over all other forms of human love. It is God's love which creates us, guides us, forgives us, comforts us, inspires us. It is because God loves us that we can now love others. God's love is all of those things which love should be. God's love forgives us when our love is not like that, and helps us along the path of making our love to be like that. God's love is the greatest. God's love never ends. Despite all of our faults and failures, God's love keeps us all loving together.

Hugh Grant got it right, love actually is all around us; God's love. It is love which binds us to God, and God's love which binds us to each other. This love works in both our closer relationships and in our Christian communities. Living together, on any level, is also about loving together. As we know the perfectness, the unendingness, and the all forgiving and inclusive nature of God's love, by the strength of His love may we continue to both live in it live it out in our lives also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

Nothing Without Love

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

- What is the difference between words or actions which are done to make the speaker/doer look good, or gain praise for themselves, and those which are done in love? Which would you prefer?
- What are some things we/you might sometimes do with the wrong motive or intention? How can you change this to have sharing God's love as your motivation, and what difference would that make?

Love is ...

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, 13

- Can you think of specific instances/accounts where these words can be used to describe how God shows His love for us?
- Take time to look at these words and use them as a lense to look at your relationships with others, on all levels. In what areas can you improve? Where are you going well?
- Thank God for the relationships you have which are reflective of His love for us. Ask for His forgiveness and help to change those relationships which need to come back to what He intended.
- Praise God for the love He shows us, especially in Jesus. Pray for His help in living in and living out this love.

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