

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera Qld

12th May 2024 – Mother's Day

Isaiah 49:14-17

ULTIMATE LOVE

When we think about 'love' it is a word, an emotion, an action, which can be applied in many different ways, can't it? We can love bright sunny days at the beach or walking through the bush, or we can love a full-on rainy day sitting inside playing games with family or friends. We can love chocolate or ice cream, a pet, or doing our hobby. And of course, we can love people. Sometimes this can be conditional, like the romantic love we have for that one special person. It's conditional because there are reasons why we love that person in a different way to how we love anyone else in the world. And that's a good thing; imagine if everyone loved everyone else with that same level of romantic love? It'd be a pretty messed up world.

But when we think of 'ultimate love', most of us would think of the love of a parent for a child. That's a love which is unconditional; before the child is born and we know anything at all about them we already love them. Before they are conceived, we know that we will love our children completely and unconditionally. And so today, a day when we think about our mothers and give thanks for them, we think about how they show this ultimate, unconditional, sacrificial, love for their children. It's a love we see in the animal kingdom, where many mothers will either stand between danger and their offspring, or they will make sure their offspring are safe while they draw the predator away, sometimes with deadly consequences for themselves (think of how Bambi's mother died in the classic movie). Our mothers also can, and do, do everything they can for us. From my experience it is only as you get older and look back that you see and really appreciate the sacrifices they made in the love they showed; what they did and gave up to do the best for you they possibly could. As we think about how mothers carry out their role as God intended it to be, we can see that it really is all about ultimate love.

Ultimate love. Of course, as we think of this kind of love we also think of the love God has for all people. The love which comes out in His creation and care for the whole world. The love He has shown ultimately in sending Jesus to die on the cross and rise again for us. The love which is written in the blood

of that sacrifice. In the reading we have here today from Isaiah 49, God talks about the love a mother has for child she nurses and has borne. He uses the description of this motherly love, which both the readers back then and we today know that in most cases is an unbreakable bond of ultimate love, he uses it to describe how great and unending God's love is for us all. Despite how it might come across it's not meant to be a comparison, because we know that in most cases a mother's love does have no limits, just like God's love doesn't. Instead, we can take it as a passionate declaration of just how great God's love is. Like the love of a mother for her baby, it is unending, it is sacrificial, it is the ultimate love which will do all it can for the one who is loved.

One thing we know, a reality of life, is that when we love someone, especially in this kind of complete and unconditional way, we open ourselves up to being hurt. That is one of the risks we take with loving someone. No one is perfect, and a parent being hurt by their child, either deliberately or inadvertently, is one of the sacrifices which is made by this ultimate love. We can probably all look back, with regret, on some of the things we said and how we treated our parents at times over the years. Part of our human nature is often that instead of focusing on what is done for us, or what we do get, we can instead be drawn to what we miss out on. So cries of, 'it's not fair', 'you never give me anything', 'he/she always gets more than me', can be directed towards the ones who do everything they can for us. Many of us have probably made those accusations, many of us have probably also received them. However they are said or meant, they can hurt, but ultimate love means that despite the hurt they are forgiven and that love is shown anyway, even when it's not always felt and appreciated.

'It's not fair'. 'You don't understand'. 'You never help me'. Accusations we can not only make towards our parents, and perhaps hear from our children, but accusations we can also make towards God. That's what people were saying at the time of Isaiah, 'The Lord has turned away from us and forgotten us'. (14b) We know from reading the Bible that whenever God's people got themselves in trouble, and like in this case here ended up being defeated by their enemies and taken away as slaves in exile, that it wasn't because God had forgotten and left His people, but because they had forgotten and left Him. Like a child making that same accusation against a parent, the people ignored that detail. And that's when Isaiah speaks

to them God's reply in the words we have here; see how much a mother loves her child, that is how much God loves you.

And then God goes on to say; 'A picture of your city is drawn on my hand. You are always in my thoughts!' (16) Your city, where you live, you, are drawn on my hand. Does anything come into your head when you hear those words? You may well think of God's love being shown, in blood, in Jesus' death on the cross, when the nails through His hands were the sign of God's love for us. That's how great God's love for us is. That is why none of us can ever truly say, "The Lord has turned away and forgotten us." Only Jesus, hanging and dying on the cross, could ever truly make that cry. And in making it, in taking the price of sin in separation from God upon Himself, He made sure that it is a cry none of us would ever have to make.

But still, we might feel like that sometimes, don't we? Children might make this accusation against their parents when either the parent is using a life situation to help them learn something, or the trouble the child has got themselves into is of their own doing. I can think of times from my childhood when I thought I was incredibly hard done by, but looking back and reflecting on my experiences with my own children and now grandchildren, all I can do is shake my head and smile and thank God my parents did continue to love me.

When are the times we can feel like we are exiles, abandoned, that whether we are complaining or not God's love feels a long way from us? Is it when we keep on praying for a situation in our lives or the lives of our loved ones and it just doesn't seem like our prayers are being answered? A relationship that seems to not be being repaired or a conflict that cannot be resolved no matter how hard we feel we are trying, especially on this day as we focus on close relationships? Wanting guidance from God on our life's direction, or in regard to an issue or situation, but feeling we are not really getting it? Grief or sorrow, or guilt, which is hard to move on from? Is there anything right now, or from the past but is still affecting you, which might make you sometimes think, even a bit, 'God's not with me now', just like the people of Israel did back then?

Some of you may recognise those words here from verse 15, 'Could a mother forget a child who nurses at her breast? Could she fail to love an infant who came from her own body? Even if a mother could

forget, I will never forget you.’ They are words we hear in the baptism order we use here at St. Andrews to describe the love of God we are joined to in our Baptism. And it is good for us to remember that as we reflect on those times that we might feel like we are abandoned by God in any way, or at least when we feel that He is not listening to us the way that we think He should. In our baptism we are bound to God’s ultimate love, that love which is shown for us in Jesus giving up His life for us, in a way that cannot be broken or changed. The bond of love which is secured there means that whenever we might say, ‘where are you, God?’, He replies, ‘I’m right here, with you, as always. Always waiting for you to come to me so that you can have and experience the life I have to give you. It doesn’t matter how much you have hurt me, or hurt yourself, my love is as strong and unending as that of a mother for her child. Please, come home, so I can cover you in that love’. By making us His children in our baptism, this is the love, the unending love, the ultimate love, we are now drawn into.

Ultimate love. A good way to describe the way we think of our mothers as we remember and give thanks to them on this day. A good description also of the love God has for us all, the love we are joined to in our baptism, the love written on the hands of Jesus as He died on the cross for us. Thank God for the gift of mothers, and for the great love and care they show their children. Thank God also that His is a love which is always there for us, unending, always forgiving, and which calls us to be always living in and for Him. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Think about the love and care you have received from your mother, grandmother, or other women who have cared for you in your life. If you are able to, thank them for all they have done for you. If your relationship with your mother isn’t so good, or mothers your relationship with your children, bring that to God in prayer and ask for His help in healing and restoring this relationship.
- What does it mean to you that God shows you ultimate love? How would your life be different if you didn’t know His love?
- Do you ever feel like God has abandoned you? If so, in what situations? Reflect on that and see how it is most likely that you have moved away from God in some way. Ask God’s help in following Him in a way in which you can know and experience His love always.
- We receive God’s love, and we are called to take it out. Ask God to help you see and respond to situations in which you can share His love this week.

Pray: thank God for mothers and for all those women who care for us. Ask for the healing of relationships between mothers and children wherever that is needed. Thank God that we live in the assurance of His ultimate love, and pray that we respond to this in how we now live out our lives.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
12.05.2024*