

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera Qld

15th December 2024 – Third Sunday in Advent

Luke 1:39-45

Love of the World

Love transforms. Would you agree with that statement? Sure, it's pretty wide ranging, and people are people so we're not always going to each react and respond in the same way to things, but as a general rule we can say that love does transform us. You may be able to think of a case where you have seen that up close in someone, perhaps even experienced it yourself. It could be the love of a parent, or a step, foster, or adoptive parent. The love of a sibling, grandparent, other family member, an intimate partner, a friend. There are many stories based on the transforming power of love, and many movies; two which jump into my head are *The Blind Side*, and *Lion*. Love transforms us, normally, we hope, for the better. Love gives us a sense of worth, of belonging, of acceptance, of purpose, of value. As people, the exchange of love, the receiving and the giving, does transform us.

Love transforms. I'm going to say that love is more transformative than fear; whether that is of punishment or something else. Love transforms us because it drives an inner desire to want to change, to do something better, rather than an unwilling response to 'do it or else'. God knows that, and that's why His story with us, His people, is all about love. Way back in the beginning, when Adam and Eve first sinned, they were separated from God and sent out of the garden as a consequence of their sin. But what God focused on right back then was making them the promise that 'one day I will send a Saviour'. And God kept on making that promise, throughout the Bible. As His people continued to turn away from Him, He kept on saying, "I will send a Saviour to bring you back into a full relationship with me". Over and over, we hear God continuing to make that promise throughout the Bible, until He fulfilled it in Jesus. And so, the story of the Bible is a love

story. Jesus Himself summed it up in one of the best-known verses of the Bible, ‘God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die.’ (*John 3:16 CEV*) God knows the transforming power of love, that’s why He kept, and still keeps, on loving us in His desire to bring us all back to Him.

The transforming power and nature of love, including God’s love of the world. Where do we see God’s love in a very real and tangible way? In Jesus. Love lies in the manger, as God gave up all of His power, all of His glory, to come down as a defenceless baby to be a part of our world, our history, our lives. Love makes its way to the cross; with the price of our sin and rebellion from God having to be paid, God in Jesus gave up His life on the cross to pay this price for us. God’s love of the world is in the innocent baby lying in the manger, God’s love of the world is in the innocent man hanging dying on the cross.

The Christmas story, then, as well as being about hope and peace (as we’ve looked at the last two weeks), is also about love. We can see that on many levels, can’t we; Christmas is often the time we want to spend with family and loved ones, and the time when the absence of those we love can hit us the hardest. And knowing that at Christmas we celebrate God’s love coming into the world in Jesus, we know too that Christmas is also very much about love as we look at it from a Christian perspective. One of the best human examples we have of love, transforming, total, unconditional love, is to be found in the love of a parent for a child, so it’s fitting that the Gospel reading we have today is about two expectant mothers who both know God’s love in their lives, and who also have great love for the special child each one carries; Mary and Elizabeth. As well as their love as mothers, what comes out strongly in the accounts we have of both of these ladies is their love for God, which is shown by their trust in His promises, and their following Him in what He calls them to do. The young lady Mary, who found herself in a very unsafe predicament, and the much older Elizabeth who was way beyond normal childbearing years, were both transformed by the love of God so that they could be His faithful and trusting servants. As they

knew God's love, they were transformed by God's love, so that they could be a part of God's plan of sharing His love with others.

Not only does love transform us, but when Jesus came into the world He transformed love. He transformed the teaching of 'an eye for an eye', to 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' (*Matthew 7:12*). He said things like, 'turn the other cheek', 'pray for those who persecute you'. He talked about love in a way which was as uncomfortable for people to hear back then as it is for us today. When Jesus was one day asked, 'what is the greatest commandment of all?', He replied; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is the first and most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like this one. And it is, "Love others as much as you love yourself." (*Matthew 22:37-40 CEV*) Jesus not only said all of these things, but He did them. Because for Him love is not just a concept, a thought, or a feeling, it is an *action*. Love is what we do, what we say, how we act, how we respond. For us, receiving God's love is experiencing the blessings of what He has done and does do for us. For us, sharing God's love is about us now doing and living out these same words and actions in our lives.

God's love transforms. That's not just an historical fact from Jesus 2,000 years ago, it's a part of our lives just as much today. God's love is in the unconditional acceptance He offers us all; each one of us are His special child, loved by Him, accepted by Him. For each one of us there is the offer of God's full and total forgiveness, the lifting of our guilt, whenever we turn to Him. This transformation of love happens for us when we give to God those things we struggle with; those things we know God is calling us to stop doing, or to start doing, but we find it too difficult. In His love and support He can help us with these changes. God's love of the world changes us.

And we are called to be God's servants as part of God's love changing people also, just like Mary and Elizabeth were. Mary and Elizabeth weren't perfect, they were human, but as we hear in our reading here they trusted God's promises and were willing to be a part of His plan to take His love to all people. While God's plan for us might not be so out there or dramatic, it is there.

We are here to receive God's love, and to pass it on to others. That's God's plan for us in our lives. How does that look for you? How can you, how do you, share this love? It is in the way you give, time, effort, or money, to help those who need it, giving from the many blessings God has given to us. It is in doing what can be difficult for us, and surprising for others, and forgiving those wrong us, turning the other cheek. It is being accepting of all people, loving others as we love ourselves, seeing our role as being not to judge them but to love them – how different would the world and all communities be if we all did that! As we know God's love in our lives, we are each called to show and share it in all of our relationships with others.

Love transforms. God's love of the world, of each one of us, transforms us. In this time of Advent we focus on what it means that Jesus did come into our world, and that one day He will come again. As well as Jesus bringing hope, peace, and joy, the birth of this special child brought God's love into the world in a very real way, with a love that is just as transforming for our lives today as it was back then. God's love lay in the manger. God's love died for us on the cross. God's love is our comfort and strength, and our call, in our lives now, and gives us new life with Him for eternity. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Can you think of any people you know who have been transformed by the love of someone, or maybe you have experienced this yourself? Can you think of any stories, books or movies when this has occurred?
- What thoughts and feelings come to you when you think of God's love? If you can, stop right now, close your eyes, and try to focus on this. Reflect on any Bible readings which come to you. What does God's love mean to you at this time? What comfort do you find in it?
- God's love is not only our comfort and strength, but as it transforms us it is also our call. How is God's love calling you? How do you already help share His love with those around you? Thank God for these opportunities, and ask for His help to continue to do these things effectively. Ask God also to show you other opportunities He is calling you to follow in sharing His love.

Pray: thank God that we live in His love each day, and ask that He helps us to be open to being transformed by this love. Ask God also to help us to love as we are loved, so that all people can come to know what it is to be loved by Him.

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