Wednesday Morning Worship, 10th February 2021

**Readings**

Psalm 65 and 1 John 4:7-5:21

Reflections on this passage

The passage tells us that we love only out of a place of being loved, ‘because I first loved you.’ We are challenged in these verses to again love one another and are told very firmly that if we do not love one another then we do not know God. John is telling us that if God is love and we do not love, then how can we say we know God. I remember when I was a little girl and hearing these verses and being compelled to be nicer to my sisters and be ‘loving’. I was too afraid that if I wasn’t nice to them then I would stop knowing God. So, even when I didn’t want to be nice, I would force myself to try and be loving and kind to them. I think I had missed the point that John was trying to teach here in these verses about God’s love and our love. We are not commanded to love one another to earn or become worthy of God’s love. We love one another because we are loved by God, and have received that love, and live in the light of it.

I wonder what loving people at the moment looks like? How easy are we finding it to love people? Is it more of a challenge as we face our own difficulties in these times? Do we have more or less patience with people? Are we reacting or being slow to get angry?

I remember after trying very hard to love my sisters that I would get very upset and annoyed when this act of love or kindness that I would show them didn’t cause them to give me love back or be kind in return! The love John speaks of comes from the ancient Greek word *agape*; it is the concept of a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting re-payment; it is this God-kind of love.

So, how do we love more even when it’s hard to or it hurts to? I think it is something that, like faith, we can grow in and that needs God’s help and strength. Since this is God’s kind of love, it comes into our life through our relationship with him. If we want to love one another more, we need to draw closer to God. Spending time with Jesus and in his presence, we become closer to him and are more like him. Have you ever realised when you spend so much time with a person that you start picking up the funny or odd sayings that they come out with and you don’t always realise to begin with. Or we pick up on their habits or think more like them. The more time we spend with God the more we start to reflect his nature, the more his character rubs off on us.

John shows us why this is so important. If love is of God, then those who claim to be born of God, and claim to know God, must be able to love one another in the body of Christ. Of course, this love is not perfected in the life of a Christian. Though it may not be perfected, it must be present and it should be growing. We can’t truly grow in our experience of God without also growing in love for one another. John can boldly say, ‘He who does not love does not know God’ (4:8). If there isn’t real love for God’s people in our lives, then how can we claim to know God.

What does love look like? Valentine’s Day is coming up and we can sometimes think of the word love with romance or flowers and chocolate. We can think love is a gushy emotional feeling, but real love is not dependent on feelings. The Bible teaches us that love is ‘…long-suffering and kind. It does not envy; does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails’(1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

In chapter 5, John goes on to talk about believing in Jesus as God’s son and when we believe this we are ‘born of God’ (5:1). John’s confidence is impressive. He wants us to know that we have eternal life, but we can only know this if our salvation rests in Jesus and not in our own performance. If it depends on me, then on a good day I’m saved and on a bad day, I don’t really know. But if it depends on what Jesus has done for me, then I can know. John’s great emphasis has been on love so far, but he never wants anyone to believe that we can earn salvation either by loving others. We are born of God when we put our trust in Jesus and in his saving work in our lives.

In the conclusion of this letter, John returns to the theme: fellowship with Jesus Christ. We must know him, and the word John uses for ‘know’, ‘*ginosko’* speaks of knowledge by experience. That is how Jesus wants us to know him. The work of Jesus in us gives us an understanding, and the ability to know him, and to be in him, the abiding life of fellowship that John invited us to back in 1 John 1:3. John finally ends the letter with the line ‘Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.’ (v21). This may seem like a strange way to end his letter, but it fits in with the theme of a real, living relationship with God. The opposite to fellowship with God is idolatry: embracing a false god, or a false idea of the true God. John rightly closes with this warning, after having spent much of his letter warning us against the dangers of the false Jesus many were teaching in his day. We can only have a real relationship with the God who is really there! Idolatry, whether obvious (worshipping a statue) or subtle (living for your career or someone other than God) will always hinder a real relationship with God, and damage our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Jesus. No wonder John ends with ‘keep yourselves from idols’; this is how we protect our relationship with God.

As we come to the end of our reflections on 1 John, I wonder what God has been teaching you? John has been telling us that the unity of the church through God’s love is expressed in the person of Jesus Christ. Just as much as our love for the people of God reflects our love for God, so our love and obedience to God is a demonstration of love to the body of Christ. He tells us that we need to be aware of the things that can cause us to stray away from God and to abide and remain in him. John tells us that we need to love God and love one another and not the enticing things of this world.

**What has stood out for you over the last month or so from these passages?**

**What do you think God has been saying to you through 1 John?**

**Take a few moments to pause and, in the silence, ask God this morning what he is saying to you.**

**Prayers**

As we come to a time of prayer, this may be a good point to re-read the Psalm and to remember who the God that we are living for is and the awesome and mighty God that we praise. The God that we worship and praise is the same God that we read about in Psalm 65:2 who answers our prayers, and in 1 John 5:14-15 which tells us: ‘he is approachable and we can call out to him and he hears us.’ So, let us call out to him this morning with confidence that our Saviour Jesus Christ, hears us and knows our needs and the needs of others.

We thank you Jesus for your Word. We thank you for who you are, our real and living God who is Love. We thank you that you meet with us and transform us into being more like you. Help us today to love others remembering we are first loved by you. Helps us to turn to you for strength in these challenging times and not to the enticing things of this world. Help us to draw closer to you and not apart.

Loving God.

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for those who are facing difficulties in relationships and finding it really hard to love others at the moment. May they know your love and your strength today. Give us all patience and kindness in this time showing to others what you have shown to us.

Loving God.

**Hear our prayer**

We thank you God that you are not a distant God but a close God. Let us lift up to you this morning those who we know who need to know that you are close, those who are vulnerable, isolated and lonely. We ask for your hand of protection to be upon them this morning, comfort them and fill them with your Holy Spirit. May they know your faithfulness this morning.

Loving God.

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for the church and its unity in these times, that it will grow stronger and unified. We pray that the church will grow closer together rather than being pulled apart. Let us pray for church leaders, the Archbishops, and Bishops as they seek to guide and lead well. Give them your wisdom and guidance in these times. May they trust you and lean on you always.

Loving God.

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for the parish of Bourne End, especially the people who live and work in Horseshoe Close and The Paddocks. May the people who live and work in these roads know your blessing and peace in these times. May we as a church be a light into this community.

Loving God.

**Hear our prayer**

We lift up to you teachers and all who are involved in education. As half term is so close we pray you give them a renewed strength and energy. Bless them and all the children they teach. Encouraged them in all the hard work they do to try and teach in these times.

Loving God.

**Hear our prayer**

We thank you for the good news of vaccine and all the hard work of those seeking to distribute it and manage this large operation. We think of those countries who are in desperate need of this vaccine who aren’t able to receive it, we ask for provision for these countries that they will receive in this time.

Loving God.

**Hear our prayer**

***Collect for today***

Almighty God, you have created the heavens and the earth and made us in your own image: teach us to discern your hand in all your works and your likeness in all your children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things, now and for ever.

**Amen.**