

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Not Just Another Four Letter Word"  
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Fifth Sunday of Easter

We have all probably heard too many sermons on love. Love is less about talk and more about action. It gets to the point where you wonder if love is just another four letter word people use, but don't really understand. It has great emotional value, but little content.

The Bible instructs us to love one another. It tells us that love is one of the key characteristics of the God we serve. And how God puts together love and justice, compassion and judgment, we don't quite understand. But we are to continue on the journey of loving because it is all we need, in many ways, as the Beatles sang forty plus years ago.

When we open ourselves to one another and risk sharing who we are and what is important to us with another human being, we begin on the path to love. When we care for others even though they seemingly care little for us, sometimes that is love. We are so broken that our attempts at loving others are understood in varying ways. Our loving is tainted with our own issues because our loving contains who we are. If we are overly responsible, we tend to love because of an inner compulsion to do so, we love, because we are supposed to love. If we are under-responsible, we tend to expect to be loved but may have more trouble seeing how to love others in ways that they themselves will feel loved.

Often we feel misunderstood and we misunderstand others as they try to love with love languages that differ from our own. Some want the loving words and that's enough. Others want the acts of service and kindness because that shows love. Others only understand love with touch. Most of us know that love takes time, and even set up parameters to insist that there is a certain kind of quality time which is required for love to be exchanged. Still others give or expect gifts to be given to show love. We have many languages we use. The problem is when someone is speaking a foreign language that we do not understand. This is compounded with hurts and misunderstandings from the past.

This is why attempts to love can be very painful. We are all broken. We all fail at times to deliver that which we think we know is good. Broken

relationships, harmful words, sarcastic tone, can layer up inside us so we have a tendency to even be suspicious of a loving person. Many of us get to a point where we find a person must prove themselves to us before we attempt to love or care for them in any significant way.

The days of a happy child looking to play something new with a new friend seem long ago. We become defensive and worried, anxious and fearful. The news showing us the darker side of humanity does not help us to love. It makes us wonder whether the neighbour or the new person has committed some of the horrific acts we hear about on the local broadcast.

And yet we know at the same time that we really need to be loved, and to have friends. This is the bedrock of how we experience our lives. Our lives are so much more than what we tell ourselves. Our reality is experienced as we share with others, and receive their perspective on what is going on. If they see our life as troubled, always getting the dirty end of the stick, and disheartening in many ways, surely we will perceive it as such, at least to some degree. If our friends see our lives as precious receptacles of good and amazing gifts, full of thankfulness for all that we do have, and not sweating over the small stuff, then we shall perceive ourselves and experiences accordingly. Much of how we perceive our lives depends upon how we choose to encounter change.

Peter's friends in Jerusalem had no idea why he had broken the Jewish laws and spent time with Gentiles in their homes. At this time in the history of the new Church, the faith was completely understood as a Jewish sect, only for Jewish people. Even though Jesus had tried to show his friends that his project for the world was comprehensive, they had not understood. But now with Peter's triple dream or vision of eating animals that are not kosher or clean, and with the timing of the arrival of the Gentiles at his house, he was being led into a new understanding of what God was doing. Then the Gentiles accepted the faith, turned from their sins, and received the Holy Spirit, so that they were convinced this was all from God.

But it was never for certain that the wider church in Jerusalem would agree with this interpretation of events. Yet they did, by the grace of God. This was huge change for the understood mission of the new Jesus movement. This may seem foreign to us. It was a bridging of cultures from having to adhere to all Jewish laws and lifestyle issues to a new freedom. Later on in Acts 15, the Church would decide to only require that Gentiles restrict their

diets in regards to how their meat was prepared and to refrain from sexual immorality. The latter is still being debated today in the church, and the former seems to be a non-issue.

The Church was able to work out its cultural and spiritual challenges and issues, but it was always struggled to do so. So we shouldn't be surprised when we find the same to be true in our own time. In fact, we shouldn't be surprised when we struggle to work out our own relationships with one another, because we are still learning how to love.

There will come a time when we are able to truly love in the way God loves us. That time is talked about in Revelation 21.