**Two Rivers Mission Community**

**Values 1: Love**

Readings: 1 Corinthians 13 & John 15.9-17

If I was to ask you to complete the sentence, “God is…” I wonder what words you would come up with?

God is…

Good… faithful… merciful… just?

Maybe, but I suspect most of us, if we had to pick just one word to describe God would go for “God is… love”.

The bible is shot through with references to God’s love,

And in 1 John 4.8, John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” wrote explicitly: “God is love”.

The bible is also clear that love should be the most important characteristic of human beings.

Jesus summed up everything God requires of us in the two commands to love God and similarly love our neighbour (Mark 12.30-31)

We might sum the whole Christian faith up in these three propositions:

God loves us

We love God

We love others

It’s for this reason that when we were putting together our mission action plan and thinking about the values by which we want to “do church” we knew that the first value we must pursue is love.

Just to give a bit of context…

We’ve been working and praying hard for the last couple of years to discern (work out) what God wants of us at this time in the life of our parishes.

We’ve committed, in our action plan, to “build a Christian community in each village, which will worship, pray, grow and reach out with the Gospel..”

To help us do that we’ve put a focal minister in each parish to work with the PCCs and church to help build up each Christian community.

We’ve formed a joint council to make working together easier.

And last week Bishop Jackie came to a mission community service in Tawstock to encourage us and bless us and pray for us.

Over the next few weeks we are going to be looking at the 5 values we believe God is calling us to display as we work out the vision to “build a Christian community in each village, which will worship, pray, grow and reach out with the Gospel.”

The values we’ll be looking at are:

Love

Faith

Being people of Word and Spirit

Generosity

And Joy

And its these values which I hope we will all work to grow in our own lives and the lives of our churches and communities.

So, today we are looking at the greatest of these values: love.

And as we do, perhaps we might ponder these questions:

1. How can we *know* love?
2. How can we *show* love?
3. How can we *grow* love?

If I may be so bold, there’s a lot of nonsense talked about love.

One thing you often hear is that if you love someone you must accept and affirm everything they think and do.

But when you think about this, its nonsense. Which parent affirms their children’s’ desire to play pirates with a set of carving knives!

Love warns of danger.

Love sets boundaries.

Love helps people to change.

Another misconception is that love means you don’t have to say sorry… I think that came from the film Love Story.

But surely the opposite is true – if you love someone and hurt them you want to apologise and put things right.

So how, as Christians can we make sure we have a true understanding of love?

Well, we look to God.

If God is perfect love, then we learn love from him.

In Jesus we see what a perfectly loving life looks like in practice.

1 John 3.16 says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.”

Love is a very practical giving of ourselves for the good of another.

St Paul elaborates on this in 1 Corinthians 13. “Love is patient, love is kind…”

It is of course one thing to know what love is intellectually. Its quite another thing to know it in our hearts and souls.

The first of the fruits of the Spirit, the good character traits which the Holy Spirit grows in the hearts of Christians and within a church, is “Love” (Galatians 5.22-23)

God’s desire for us is not just that we can give a good dictionary definition of love, but that we experience his love in our hearts.

We need to pray for God to fill us with his Spirit, to give us an experience of his love, to grow it within us.

And we need to show love to one another so we can experience that love in real and practical ways.

Which brings us to our second question: “How can we show love?”

Well, I guess its obvious, but we can make the decision to treat people like Jesus.

And be obedient to his commands about how to love.

A good start might be:

To care for those in need (the Good Samaritan, the parable of the sheep and goats).

To give time to people who need it, even those with nothing to offer (the woman suffering from bleeding).

To not judge others (the parable of the speck and plank in the eye).

To seek the good and pray for those who are not so nice to us, or even persecute us (Jesus on the cross).

To speak the truth and stand up to those who lead others astray (Jesus’ interaction with the pharisees).

To ask ourselves in any and every situation “What would Jesus do?” is not such a bad idea.

So, we know love because God first loved us and he pours his love into our hearts. We show love by following the teaching and example of Jesus.

Thirdly, then, how can we grow love?

Well, love is like a muscle. If we use it, it grows. If we don’t use it, it withers and becomes useless.

I think it helps when we make the effort to see things through the eyes of other people. What does it feel like to be them?

And then when we treat people as we would like to be treated.

Luke 6.31: “Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.”

It helps when we see people as Jesus sees them: as people made by God, loved by God and for whom God has good plans and purposes.

Let’s be praying that God would help us to love as he loves.

Let me end by painting a picture.

A picture of a church that is alive with love.

When the church meets together, there is always worship as people express their love for God. Its obvious that people have experienced God’s love in Jesus and love him in return.

That love overflows into love for others.

This is a church which knows God loves everyone just as they are…

And that God also loves people too much to leave them just where they are.

This is a church where lives are transformed by love.

In this church people find a welcome, acceptance, grace. They experience healing and find hope.

This a church with a love for its community and the wider world.

It shares the good news of Jesus.

It prays for those in need near and far… and does practical things to help.

This is a practical church; where love is spelled A-C-T-I-O-N.

This is a church where people feel at home… and where Jesus feels at home.

For Jesus is at the heart of the church… and the whole church exists for him.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, we know love because you first loved us.

Please fill our hearts… our church… our community with your love.

Help us to love you above all things and love our neighbour as ourselves.

And so may your love radiate from us into the world around,

To your praise and glory,

Amen