

Ephesians 5.1, 29-30

Love: yourself

Amington St Editha

Sunday 27 August 2017

Loving others

Bible tells us time and again to stop being obsessed with ourselves and instead serve others.

A little girl was being selfish with her toys, not sharing with her brothers. Her Dad sat her down and gave her a big lecture about being selfish. When he was done, the little girl said; 'Daddy, I don't even have a shell fish!'

In humility value others above yourselves (Philippians 2.3, NIV).

'Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave' (Matthew 20.26-27, NIV).

In his most direct description of being a disciple, Jesus says, **'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'** (Mark 8.34).

Christians are called not to act like self-centred popstars, but to be self-sacrificing servants. The Christian life is one of sacrifice – real, costly discipleship. It is not for the faint-hearted, nor the double-minded.

As we've seen over the summer, in his summary of the law, Jesus tells us to:

‘ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’

Matthew 22.37-40 (NIV)

And as we saw last week, Jesus gives us the parable of the Good Samaritan to show us who our neighbours are – even our sworn enemies – and what it means to love them – to care for them even as we would care for our closest friend, even for ourselves.

After all, Paul says, **no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body** (29). The assumption here is that it is easy to love ourselves.

And on one level perhaps it is. When we are hungry, we know it and we can eat something. When we are thirsty, we drink. When we are tired, we sleep.

We know our needs, and – often without even realising – we love ourselves enough to meet those needs, without hesitation.

Do we know the hurt?

Ash gave birth to baby Elsie this week – and they are doing well, thank the Lord! I'm told that one of the hardest things with having a baby is working out what the baby needs and wants – they can't talk to tell us! Most of the time they probably don't even know themselves – they feel pain, hunger, tiredness, and they have one response: to cry. And cry. And cry!

Friends, I don't know if it's some of the pain that is deep inside me – but I don't think I'm alone. When babies are upset, they cry. When grown-ups are upset, they hold it inside. Anger, regret, resentment, even bitterness – so many of us hold these things in our heart.

Sure, we put a brave face on, and don't even realise it ourselves most of the time, but it's there, festering and growing. Until one day, we can't hold it in any more.

The Good Samaritan in some ways had it easy – the need was obvious: a man had been beaten up and was lying by the side of the road, half dead.

Sometimes our needs are not so obvious.

Disordered love

A Sunday School teacher was telling the story of the Good Samaritan to her class of 4-5 year olds. She was making it as vivid as possible to keep the children interested in her tale. Then she asked the class, 'If you saw a person lying on the roadside all wounded and bleeding, what would you do?' A thoughtful little girl broke the hushed silence... 'I think I'd throw up.'

Some children were asked when it's ok to kiss someone:

- 'When they're rich.' (Pam, age 7)
- 'If it's your mother, you can kiss her any time. But if it's a new person, you have to ask permission.' (Roger, age 6)
- 'It's never okay to kiss a boy. They always slobber all over you. That's why I stopped doing it.' (Tammy, age 10)

St Augustine said that the human capacity for love is broken. Sometimes we love the wrong thing. Sometimes we love the *right* thing, but too much – and sometimes too little.

Friends, it is easy to love ourselves too much, to be selfish and self-centred. But it is also possible – sometimes at the same time! – to love ourselves *too little*, to disregard or ignore our own pain, our hurt and our difficulties, to paper over the cracks.

When I was younger I was taught the little mnemonic JOY to help me remember the order of love: Jesus first, Others second, Yourself last. It has always stuck with me.

But sometimes it becomes JO, not JOY – Jesus first, Others Second, and yourself not at all.

Here, as in everything else, whether it is money and possessions, family, work, leisure – we need to love ourselves *in the right way*. We need Goldilocks love – not too much love, not too little love, *but just the right amount of love*.

Do you love yourself? Do you pay attention, not only to your physical needs but your spiritual needs, your emotional needs as well? Do you love God first, Others second, but not forgetting to love and care for yourself as well?

If the answer is 'no' then hear the first verse of our reading today: **follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children** (1).

Friends, one way to describe being a Christian is learning to see things as God sees them. And that goes for yourself. It is so easy for us to see the mess, to see the nasty thoughts, the gossipy words, the anger, the hurt, the bitterness – it is so easy to see all that inside our hearts, and our love for ourselves fails.

I know, because this is something I struggle with.

Dearly loved

If it were not for God I would be a complete fraud, standing up here preaching week after week, daring to be a leader of God's people in Amington. But God. Two little words: but God.

But God is amazing. He is full of power and full of love. **Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children** (1). I have not always followed God's example. In fact I frequently haven't.

But Paul doesn't say, follow God's example *and you'll be* dearly loved children. There is no GCSE or A Level we have to pass in order to be loved by God. No, thank goodness. Paul says: follow God's example *because you already are* dearly loved children.

This is who you *are*, Paul says, so *be* who you *are*. It's not about earning love, it's about living it out.

Which means that failing, making mistakes, messing up – these things do not stop you being a dearly loved child of God. It can't be taken away, because you never earned it in the first place – *Jesus* passed the GCSE for you – he's already sorted all that stuff out for us, so it's gone, dead, killed on the cross.

Today our topic is 'love: yourself.' But perhaps it should be slightly longer: 'love yourself as God loves you.'

Do you love yourself as God loves you?

If this is something you struggle with, perhaps you could pray a simple prayer this week, every morning when you wake up.

'Thank you Father that I am your dearly loved child.'

That's it. Nothing fancy, simply words from Scripture to pray.

'Thank you Father that I am your dearly loved child.'

If you aren't a Christian yet, but you want to be a dearly love child of God, please talk to me – or a Christian friend who can help you. There's no entrance exam – we simply put our trust in our Father, who dearly loves us, his children.