

Philippians 4.4-8

Love Happened

Things I don't understand

Several years ago I was on a train from London to Durham. At Darlington, a man and a boy got on the train and sat in the chairs across the aisle from where I was sitting.

You know how when people are talking quite loudly, and you try to be polite and ignore them, but you don't quite manage to? They were chattering away, but I couldn't work out what language they were speaking. I could hear words that were, quite definitely, English words – but most of them, I didn't have a clue. On they went, and I got more and more confused.

And then I realised: they were Geordies! It wasn't only the accent I was struggling to understand, it was the dialect words they were using as they chatted away. Even though we were all English, I had not a clue what they were talking about.

Some of you perhaps don't understand cricket. I love cricket, so *I* don't understand people who don't understand cricket!

But the most confusing thing of all, the thing I don't understand and probably never will – is women.

When I got married, my father-in-law quoted Oscar Wilde: 'women are meant to be loved... not understood.'

It was good advice.

Peace that passes understanding

In the reading from Philippians – St Paul's letter to the church in the town of Philippi – he talks about **the peace of God, which transcends all understanding** (7). In other words: **the peace of God, which** *doesn't make sense*.

When Paul wrote these words, he was in prison, facing a trial and probable execution. He had spent his life being arrested on false charges, betrayed and abandoned by friends, beaten by the authorities, even shipwrecked a couple of times. And now, here he was, in prison, facing execution simply for being a Christian.

And yet he knew **the peace of God**. Despite all that rubbish in his life, he knew **the peace of God – the peace of God** *which doesn't make sense*. It doesn't make sense, because he had no right to be peaceful! He should have been shouting from the rooftops, hiring extra lawyers, writing to politicians, to say, 'Let me out!'

There will be times ahead, N and N, where you face difficulties. That may be the troubles we all face in life, it may be when one of you really upsets the other – it may be something little that gets blown out of all proportion.

When that happens I encourage you to remember Paul: in prison, facing death, but full of **the peace of God**. He had no right to feel peaceful, and you may feel like peace is the last thing you can feel when things are going wrong.

But that is Paul's point. It is precisely *when* things are going wrong that we feel **anxious** (6). And it is in those times, when peace seems impossible, that Paul says: get on your knees, and pray. Give thanks for the good things, he says, and **present your requests to God** (6).

It isn't that God will then snap his fingers and magically solve all your problems. God doesn't normally work like that.

No: when we pray to Jesus, we lift our eyes out of our situation, out of our problems, and see God. Gazing at something peaceful is calming – and the Bible calls Jesus the Prince of Peace. Praying to Jesus is the way we take a deep breath, spiritually.

CS Lewis used the weather as a way of illustrating faith. Some countries are blessed with blue, cloudless skies. Ours is not. So CS Lewis said he believed in God like he believed in the sun on a cloudy day – not because he could see it in the sky, but because *by its light he could see everything else*.

Paul knew peace because when he prayed to Jesus, he was filled with the peace of knowing and trusting the one who holds the world in his hand. We may not understand everything, but we can trust the one who does: that is how we find peace.

And it is also how we find true love. When we pray and focus on Jesus we discover true love – and no matter *what*, **nothing** can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Which isn't some fluffy airy-fairy floating on clouds with harps nonsense.

Love is something you *do*. It is an action, an act of the will, a sacrifice. It is something real, something concrete.

We know this because the ultimate example of love isn't a song by Beyoncé or a sonnet by Shakespeare. The best example of love *happened*. It *happened* on a Roman cross, in an empty tomb, on a Jerusalem hillside, as Jesus died, rose again and returned to the Father, to show his love and give his life to all who believe in him.

For us that love looks like a wayward child being welcomed home, completely forgiven and given a fresh start as part of the family they belonged to all the time. That's why Jesus died, and that's the kind of love I pray you, N and N, will know and share with one another and those around you.

Today is, I hope, a wonderful day for you both. But it is only the beginning of a lifelong journey of commitment and love – as together you navigate around, over and through the bumps and troubles we all face.

When those difficult days come, I pray that you will remember today. Remember Paul encouraging the Philippians not to be anxious, but to pray – not for all their problems to be solved, but so they might know **the peace of God** that doesn't make sense, the peace that comes from knowing that in Jesus love *happened*, and nothing can ever take that away from us.

And that goes for all of us here. If you think you need to know more about **the peace of God** that doesn't makes sense, the church is always here, and Jesus the Prince of Peace is always ready and willing to listen to our prayers.

Amen.