

## DEEP HEARTFELT LOVE



### INTRODUCTION

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How do we answer when we are asked: “Why are you a Christian?” or “Why do you want to go to heaven?” or “Why do you live a life that is different to the worldly norms?” or “What makes Christianity different to other religions and beliefs?”. I am sure that our answers will include statements such as “I believe...” and “the Bible says...”.

Faith is indeed an important part of our answer to the questions posed above. Many of our members have testified how their faith supported them in overcoming various trials and tribulations. In our Western society, we tend to be very rational, analytical, and factual. Everything must be understood and proven. Hence, it is often difficult of rationalise and explain faith. It is also not so simple as to say: “just believe” or “make a decision to believe”. Although faith can be exercised and developed, faith is a gift from God that is activated by the Holy Spirit.

Answering the questions based on the Scripture as recorded in our Bible is a sound approach. Jesus answered many question from the Scriptures. In today’s Gospel reading, the resurrected Jesus joined Cleopas and another on the road to Emmaus. They were coming to terms with the events of the crucifixion and the “purported” resurrection. Their eyes were closed to recognising Jesus. They were debating whether Jesus was a mighty prophet or indeed the Redeemer of Israel. Jesus answered them from the Scriptures: “And He said to them: “O foolish ones, slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?”. And beginning with Moses and all the Prohpets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the

things concerning Himself.” Luke 24: 25 – 27. So, answering from the Bible is indeed powerful.

The question remains why? Why Christ, why faith, why repentance, why justification, why sanctification, why glorification? The answer is quite simply: love!

## GOD OF LOVE

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Our liturgy includes the quote from John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”. Love is what sets God apart from all other gods and from all other religions, faiths and beliefs. Yes, many religions and value systems include aspects of showing kindness, tolerance and love to others. But the kind of love we experience from God and as referred to in the Bible is unique to God.

The original Greek word used for God’s love is “agape”. The word was translated in the King James Version as “charity” from the Latin word “caritas”. It is the highest form of love and could be paraphrased as: “God loved me so much that He sacrificed his Son Jesus Christ for my sins when I did not deserve it. In return I show my love for Him by unselfishly loving all other people”. “Agape” is different from the other kinds of love such as love for oneself, romantic love, friendship love, family love etc.

The Old and New Testament books of the Bible describe God as a God of love. King David frequently refers to the “steadfast love” of God. Examples include:

- “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His steadfast love ensures forever!” 1 Chron 16:34
- “Let Israel say: “His steadfast love endures forever.”” Ps 118:2
- “Consider how I love your precepts. Give me life according to Your steadfast love.” Ps 119:159
- “Show us Your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us Your salvation.” Ps 85:7
- “When I thought: “my foot slips”, Your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.” Ps 94:18

The beloved disciple John confirmed that love is integral to the character of God: “...love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8.

John went on to explain that the only reason why each one of us can love, is because God loved each one of us first: “We love because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19. How profound is it that God loved us first. How amazing is the grace of God to love sinners. Totally undeservedly, each one of us is being loved by the Creator of the universe and Sustainer of all. And because of this love, we have the capacity to love.

When Cleopas and another walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, they were not just intellectually engaged. They felt something deep in their hearts. Later, when their eyes were opened and they realised it was the resurrected Jesus who walked and

talked with them, they professed: “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened the scriptures?” Luke 24:32.

Do we feel the love and the presence of the Lord burning deep in our hearts? If the answer is no or if we feel the love fading, we must turn to the Father and call on His promise through the prophet Ezekiel that we will be given a new heart and the Holy Spirit: “I will give you a new heart, a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:26, 27)

After His resurrection, Jesus asked Peter three times: “Do you love me?” How would I answer that question? When we love someone, be it our parents, our children, our spouses, our partners or our close friends, we don’t find it hard to say: “I love you”. And it is precious to hear back: “I love you too”. How often do we say to the Lord: “I love you”? Our daily prayer ought to include the following: “Father, thank you for loving me first. I love you too.”.

Now, we need to remember that although God is the God of love, God is also the God of justice and righteousness. We must be aware of the wrath of God that could be invoked when we willfully reject the love of God. In the second commandment, we are warned of the consequence if we betray the love of God and serve another god: “I the Lord your God is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” Exodus 20:5 – 6.

## JESUS WALKED IN LOVE

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During His time on earth, Jesus distilled the essence of all the laws and commandments into the following: “the most important is...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and will all your sole and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Mark 12:30 – 31).

Jesus demonstrated His love for His Father and His love for others. He showed His love for the Father by keeping His commandments: “...I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.” John 15:31. Jesus did so by healing, teaching, feeding and caring for all those in need. He showed the ultimate act of love by dying for all underserving sinners on the cross. At times, Jesus was also assertive in His actions. When the temple was dishonoured, He drove out all the merchants from the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and seats of the pigeon merchants.

It is vital that the motivation and driving force for our all that we do as Christians should be our love for God. It is so easy to fall in a trap of religion and religious acts that are

far removed from the love of God. The red lights should come on when the motivation of our actions are “compliance with the rules”. Our motivation should always be “I want to because I love God” rather than “I must because the rules says so”. We must guard against being so busy with the church of God and fighting the cause of righteousness, but then losing sight of our God of the church and our God of righteousness.

In the Isle of Man and in the UK where Christians continuous must stand up against ungodliness and laws that are dishonoring God, we must always be motivated by love. May we always act, write and speak with love so that we are able to truthfully say: “...so that the world may know that we love the Father.”

When our actions and words are without love, it will come to nothing regardless of how righteous or Biblically “correct” it may appear to be. The Apostle Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 13 that religious acts without love comes to nothing. Even if we are “next level Christians” with the gifts to speak in tongues, or have prophetic powers, or can understand mysteries or have top class PhD Bible knowledge but we have no love, we will be nothing. If we had so much faith that we were able to move a mountain (Jesus said we only need as much a mustard seed of faith to do that!) we would still be nothing. If we cranked-up our “sacrifices” to give all our possessions away or even if we became martyrs to the point of going to jail or even be put to death, but we don’t have love, we will gain nothing.

#### LOVE IN ACTION, ACTION IN LOVE

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Last week Peter Murcott challenged us to be ready to run on the path of our continued sanctification. That is ready to obey Jesus day by day, ready to overcome evil with good, ready to encourage others to do the same; ready to meet the world with God’s Word. He challenged us to be full of fire and fearless rather than being full of fear and fireless.

May we indeed be ready to run in love and with love and for love. The Apostle Peter said: “...love one another earnestly from a pure heart...” 1 Peter 1:22. May our earnest love be fueled in our hearts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, our Helper. And when we are asked next time “Why...?”, may our answers include: “...because God loved me first when I did not deserve it, and I love Him and you in return.”

AMEN

Collect (Prayer before the readings): Almighty Father, Who in Your great mercy gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord, give us such knowledge of His presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained by His risen life and serve you continually in love, righteousness and truth, through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord, Who is alive and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever. Amen

Readings: Old Testament: Psalm 116

New Testament: 1 Peter 1:13 - 25

Gospel: Luke 24:13 - 35

Hymns:

1. 296 (Mission Praise): I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6z90HPZw6k>
2. 988 (Mission Praise): How deep the Father's love for us  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlyMxBj17LE>
3. 799 (Mission Praise): All I once held dear  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxpPla-BskY>
4. 393 (Common Praise): Brother, Sister let me serve you  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JahFRDrSCs>