

Grace Lutheran Community,
5th March 2023: Second Sunday in Lent

The sermon text for today is based on the
Gospel, John Chapter 3, verses 16 - 17.

What is love? We might think of the love we see lived out in modern movies or on the internet. Perhaps we might think of the good old days when love seemed more honourable than today. Love might be seen as between two people or even love for a location that makes you feel satisfied or joyful.

When it comes to love however we can be terribly hurt when the person we love lets us down. Perhaps the trust we have in the other person is broken through misunderstanding or just even selfishness that causes hurt. Love hurts one song says. Yet what do we understand when it comes to God's love?

Do we hear the words of our Lord and know that God is love and that He first loved us. In Christ we are loved to the point of death. Jesus came into the world to suffer and die and to rise again on the third day for the sin of the world. On that cross Jesus defeated sin, death and the power of the devil for the world, for you and for me so that we might live in Him. That by faith in Jesus we receive forgiveness of sin. Our guilt and shame are removed by the blood of Jesus washing us clean, making our hearts pure white. By faith in Jesus we are saved

from sin, eternal death and the power of the devil and by faith we receive life, eternal life.

So in a world where love is often used as a transactional activity or used to manipulate the young or those who are vulnerable because of circumstance or health do we forget the depth of God's love for us?

Saint Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians, 'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.'

This is not a list of how we should love in the sense of law. You must do this. Rather this is God's love in action. God is patient, God is kind and so on. God does not keep a record of wrongs, God rejoices in the truth as Jesus is the truth. God never fails His love is eternal.

At the end of Saint Paul's letter he says this, 'And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.' For we will no longer need faith when we stand face to face with Jesus nor will we need to hope for the promises of God to be fulfilled, these two things will vanish. What remains

today, tomorrow and forever is God's love for you and for me. God's love for the world.

We get to respond to God's love because He first loved us. Jesus sends us into the world in this love to love one another just as Jesus has loved you. We get to share this love and in Jesus we certainly get better at it as He changes our hearts by His spirit to be patient in love, kind in love and so on. This is not my love but God's love in me to be shared when as our hearts are filled with God's love. So when it comes to love, God's love will never let you down, nor will it disappoint. God's love is now in you and forever in you and it is out of this deep love for you that God had a plan to punish the sin of the world, that began in the disobedience of Adam and Eve and our very own disobedience to God. So God had a plan.

In John's account of the gospel we read, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' You may know this bible verse very well. You may have seen it on posters or stickers. And for some of you it might be your favourite bible verse. But how many of you know verse 17 well?

God's plan out of His great love for us was to punish sin as His son became sin. On the cross God judges and punishes sin so that we have a way forward. In Jesus we have life, forgiveness and salvation because God loved us. So verse 17 gives us insight into God's heart.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

We will not perish as we believe in Jesus for that is God's plan. In faith we receive God's promise of life and forgiveness through His only Son Jesus for Jesus came to save the world . God did not send Jesus to condemn, to destroy but to save and heal through His sacrifice. His blood shed on Calvary for you and me.

So friends as you go out this week know you are loved. Loved to the point of eternal life in Jesus – all you have to do is receive this gift by believing. And as you go know that God loved you first so you can love each other in a new way. A way of kindness, peace, joy and forgiveness. Go in God's love that fills you by His spirit and be as Christ to each other. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen