

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS
Tel: 01202-824834 – Email: janice.morgan@methodist.org.uk

Sunday Scriptures: 14th February 2021 St Valentine's Day

Leviticus 19:17-18 *Love your neighbour as yourself*

¹⁷You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself, I Am the LORD.”

Deuteronomy 6:4 *Love God above all else*

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Song of Solomon 1:2-3 *True Love conquers all*

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine, your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is perfume poured out; therefore the maidens love you.

Song of Solomon 2:1-4 *The Love of God is Truth and He delights in the object of His love*

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens. As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to his banqueting house and his intention toward me was love.

Reflection:

Today is the Sunday before **Lent**, the 7th before Easter, also known as Hall Sunday or Quinquagesima (50th) Sunday, the day we begin our ‘countdown’ to Easter. This year it also happens to fall on **St Valentines Day**, the traditional day to think about our spouses and loved ones in a special way. This is somewhat appropriate to begin serious reflection on our relationship with a loving God in preparation for a time of fasting and abstinence. Spring is on its way, the days begin to get longer, the cobwebs begin to show and our minds turn to clearing out and cleaning up! This applies to our heart, soul, mind and strength as much as it does to the place we live in. So I guess the best place to begin is to ask ourselves; what is LOVE? Sadly, the English language characterises all aspects of love in just one word, which encourages misconceptions that can lead to abuse. The Hebrew language is more specific and helpful in identifying the different types of love, which I will attempt to apply to the chosen Scriptures.

The first Scripture from Leviticus is set in the context of Storge or family love, which comes from the Judeo/Christian tradition of strong family orientation. Philia or affectionate love, also pertains to reactions and feelings toward brothers, sisters and close friends. Both Storge and Philia love are not sexual in focus but generous in spirit and crucial to promoting harmony within the family and throughout society. Many, both inside and outside the church, perceive the Bible as a book of don'ts! However, God's moral laws and ceremonial rules were given to help people deepen their relationship with the Creator and our relationships with each other. Historically, God's laws and codes of conduct have been and continue to be misquoted and misapplied by the corrupt nature of humanity that hungers for dominance. By the time of Jesus, the academic imposition of lawyers, priests and those in authority had turned God's law into a confusing mess of contradictory rules.

Jesus spoke against the abuses and excesses that these leaders of society had used to corrupt God's law, morals and principles to serve their own desires. Jesus did not talk about a new way to understand God's law but reiterated God's original purpose, establish them in society, and bring people back into righteousness. God's people must not hate but reprove; not take vengeance or bear a grudge but love each other as we love ourselves. *Would you want to be lied to?* Then make sure you don't lie to others! *Would you want to be slandered by gossip?* Then make sure you don't slander others with gossip! *Would you want to be used and abused?* Then make sure you don't use or abuse others! Jesus neatly simplified God's law, morals and principles when He quoted the greatest commandments of all, first to love God and second to love our neighbour as ourselves ([Matt 22:34-40](#)). If only the church would adopt these simple principles of God's law of love, maybe the whole human race might follow?

Deuteronomy spells out the importance of living according to the Word of God and is set in the context of Agape or sacrificial choice. This kind of love is divine in the sense that God commands it of us but we need His help to fully achieve it. We must choose to serve God and others even if it means giving up our own dreams, visions and aspirations. Agape is a choice of faith, to consider what God wants before oneself and resolve to put all our heart, soul and strength into fulfilling His will and purpose over our own. This is how we are to apply the Word of God to our lives and follow the example of Jesus in a secular world. When God is our first thought on waking and last thought before sleeping we will naturally teach our Children of His ways and others of His love. Scripture provides so many opportunities for object lessons and practical teaching that it would be irresponsible to refer to it only in one specific place on one day of the week. Eternal truths are most effectively learned in family and social environments of trust, friendship and love. Sunday worship should be the culmination of sharing our different experiences of God's presence in our lives throughout the week. How else can we discover where God is, what He may be teaching us or what He might be asking of us? Deuteronomy spells out the Truth of God, He is *the One, the Only, the True God*; Almighty Creator, Father, Son and Holy Spirit three in ONE God and there is no other. This is the most important insight into the mystery of God throughout time from Alpha to Omega. In God we Trust because to place our trust in anything else is to deceive ourselves into the jaws of harm. *Would we trust the stability of a swamp?* Then make sure of the ground on which you stand. *Would we trust our health to the advice of a stranger?* Then be sure of the physician you invite to perform surgery. *Would we trust our soul to the devil?* Then be sure of whose voice you listen to. Scripture tells us that, "The day must come when God will be recognised as the only One True God, who will be King over all the earth ([Zechariah 14:9](#)) and Amen to that!

Song of Solomon is a most beautiful and quite explicit love story set in the context of Eros or physical/sexual love. The English form is erotic but this term is not used in the New Testament because of its immoral pagan associations. Scripture uses Eros love only in the context of marriage between a man and a woman. Contemporary society has blurred the lines over time of what is and what is not acceptable regarding sexual relationships. In the current confusion it would seem that physical desire has superseded respect for our own body and that of others as temples of the Holy Spirit ([1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)). Sexually transmitted diseases have become common place and the nature of loving relationships confused by the dominance of sexual gratification instead of genuine love. Living together has all but replaced Biblical marriage, divorce is common place, and having children, for some, is a choice of desire rather than the result of a loving union committed to building a family before God. The lovers contained in Song of Solomon are devoted to one another

above and before anyone else. There is no envy or jealousy only trust and appreciation, because they are both giving themselves to each other generously and completely. God gives His love to us generously and completely; Jesus gave His life for us out of Agape love, generously and completely. *What kind of love do we give back?* This year we have not been able to go out and buy Valentine's cards or gifts secretly for each other or have the same choice as we normally would. But it has been interesting to see what we each instantly went for that we know is the other's favourite. God knows us infinitely better than we know each other or even ourselves. The Lord gives only good gifts, blessings that will nurture and develop our whole being because we are the object of His love. *Would we be pleased to receive chocolates laced with poison?* Then be sure to give what you know is right by God. *Would we accept a drink full of glass splinters?* Then be sure to offer what is acceptable to God. *Would we delight in false love that seeks only to deceive?* Then be sure your behaviour will delight the Lord your God.

The success of love is to make Christian belief an integral part of life and our faith life-oriented, not intellectual-oriented. When the context of daily life is used to teach about God, our children learn to love Him. When we absorb the Word of God and example of Jesus into all aspects of life, not just those that are church related, we learn to love God, Jesus, and each other completely. Today might be a good time to ask ourselves some searching questions: *Where is God in our lives? Where is God in this country? Where is God in the world?* This Valentine's Sunday let us seriously reflect on our relationships and contemplate what God might be saying to us in them, through them, and how He wants us to nurture our love for Him above all. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: HOW DEEP THE FATHER'S LOVE FOR US by Stuart Townend

CD: The Best Worship Songs Ever! **Track 3:** - can also be found on YouTube

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many ones to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart

His wounds have paid my ransom.

Poem: SPECIAL LOVE ©Janice Morgan-1993

Oh Lord give us a special love,
The kind that comes from our Father above,
A love that is patient, and gentle, and kind,
That respects, and upholds everyone it can find,
Never jealous of others, with envy, and greed,
Not given to boasting of every good deed,
But love that is deeper than a fathomless sea,
Given fully, and freely, to us Lord from Thee.

Oh Lord give us a special love,
The kind that comes from our Father above,
Shedding light on the weary, like summer sunshine,
Giving warmth to the needy, like mulled winter wine,
Supporting, and helping, those weaker than us,
Providing their needs, and not making a fuss,
Hardly noticing if others do us great harm,
But in all things praising, with thanksgiving song.

Oh Lord give us a special love,
The kind that comes from our Father above,
A love supernatural, surpassing all things,
Enabling us to ride on eagles wings,
Not demanding, and touchy, at every turn,
Holding grudges that inside us fester, and burn,
But one that is loyal, devoted, and true,
Committed to serving each other, and You.

Oh Lord give us a special love,
The kind that comes from our Father above,
Rejoicing in truth, hating every injustice,
All lessons of life being put into practice,
Unselfish, and giving, compassionate, and free,
A love such as this Lord, is what we would see,
Shared among all Your people, with warmth un-denied,
Reaching out to all others, to walk by Your side.

Oh Lord give us a special love,
The kind that comes from our Father above,
A love that gives everything, nothing held back,
That empties itself, so that others don't lack,
Reaching out to a friend walking through a great storm,
Offering that rainbow, so friendly and warm,
Going on the same journey as far as they need,
To sow in God's garden His wonderful seed.

Oh Lord give us a special love,
The kind that comes from our Father above,
Unlimited love, overwhelming, and strong,
Unending, undying, lasting all our life long,
A love that can give its most valuable prize,
To suffer and die, we just don't realise,
How can we comprehend such a wonderful love,

That is given to us from our Father above.

Prayer: *by* Julian of Norwich:

I learned that love was our Lord's meaning and saw for certain, both here and elsewhere, that before ever He made us, God loved us, and that His love has never slackened, nor ever shall; In His love all His works have been done, and in this love He has made everything serve us, and in this love our life is everlasting; Our beginning was when we were made; but the love in which He made us never had beginning; in it we shall see God forever; May Jesus grant us this, **AMEN!**
