

The heart of worship



Heart of Discipleship



The Heart of our Faith: A Passion to be like Jesus

This sermon marks the end of a journey for myself and for us as a church. One of the first things I did as a new minister back in 2002 was explore the basics of what it means to be church. The evening series I started with was called The Growing Church based on just five verses in Acts 2:

Acts 2: 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Out of these verses we learned of five things that the early church did as they grew rapidly

- Worship - Committed to God
- Fellowship - Committed to one another
- Discipleship - Committed to learn
- Service - Committed to serve
- Mission - Committed to share

These are recognised by many as the foundational principles of our faith and if we are to grow and mature as a church, then we follow these principles.

On 6th October 2003, I started a series of sermons called Heart of Worship. The idea originally was to look at the way people worshipped in the Psalms to help us get a balanced view of worship but it soon came apparent what might have been something on just worship was looking at what is at the heart of our faith. You see, they are not building blocks for the church but a reflection of who Jesus is.

- Worship – His relationship to the Father
- Fellowship – His love for others
- Discipleship – Carrying His cross – following Him
- Service – For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many
- Mission – our God is a missionary God – John 1:14 – and the word became flesh and He lived among us.

At the heart of our faith lies these five elements because they were at the heart of the relationship of the Son with the Father and with us. They were His passion and now they should be our passion. That's why most of my sermons have had the word passion in their titles for the last 18 months. There's a very popular book out called the Purpose Filled Ministry and a book called the Purpose Filled Life. They are good books. But I truly believe God wants us to have passion-filled ministries and passion-filled lives. The Heart of our faith is being like Jesus and by the power of His Spirit

indwelling us, we can be like Jesus!

- a passion for the Father
- a passion for others
- a passion for following Jesus
- a passion for serving Jesus and serving others
- a passion for spreading good news

And if we don't have that passion? Then we haven't understood who Jesus is and what He has done, not just for you or me, but what He has done for the whole world.

Yet we fall so far short. But our God is a God of opportunities and for as long as we live, we have that opportunity to be like Jesus. And that brings me back to 1 Corinthians 13. This is the third time I've preached on it – and the second time in three weeks! Why? Because this is a pivotal chapter in the New Testament and it emphasises what is at the heart of our faith because it is the heart of God – His very nature. And it's key to everything in our faith

There is, I believe, a basic ingredient which is largely lacking in Christianity today, and the lack of it is the source of most of our problems. It is the cancer which is eating away at the church, but it is no secret. In fact, it is so non-secretive that it is written on almost every page of the New Testament. And yet, because the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked, and because we are so bent on our own way, we do not see (or seeing we do not believe) that the basic message of the New Testament is LOVE! (George Verwer, A Revolution of Love, 1964)

It's so much a fundamental part of scripture. What do we learn from John 3:16? For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son. Here's another verse we have considered over the months – *John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. Or these verses John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* Or even these words: *Mark 12:9 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." 32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."* You see the connection? God loves, Jesus loves, I love, you love. Who – God, one another, our neighbour and all more than we love ourselves. In the world it's the other way around. We love ourselves first, then maybe someone else and that's it.

We know what that love is. It's agape. It's self sacrificing love. *1 John 4: 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*

And it's not just a case of saying – now go and do the same. Love must pervade all we are and all we do as the people of God, because that's what Jesus is like. I've met a lot of "Corinthian Christianity over the past few years." What was the problem with the Corinthians? They put themselves and their needs, their preferences, their points of view, their doctrines, their experience before others irrespective of how much it might hurt others or not be in accordance with the will of God. As we noticed two weeks ago, they even exercised the gifts of the Spirit; yet they hurt and damaged others. That isn't the way of the Saviour – who did not come to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.

The letters to the Corinthians are so prophetic – because they come across completely afresh to our society – they're as true now as the day they were written. You look at any church – at our church – and you will find all the sins of Corinth somewhere. It may not be as bad but it is there. We're no better and as we read this passage in 1 Corinthians again this morning we see how it just shows the contrast between who we are and what we should be like.

13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong

or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

One of the things I do is that I look after a few AOL message boards. A few weeks ago I was asked if I would like to do a stint on one of their religious boards. I normally do tech boards and they are usually polite affairs – nothing to get hot under the collar about. Not so the religious boards – they're a real hotbed of fierce argument and it gets very personal. It's called flaming on the Internet and flaming is banned on AOL boards and I have the job of moderating it. Do you know who the rudest people are? The one's who won't discuss things rationally? You've probably guessed it. They are the ones who claim to be Christians! What difference does it make that they win an argument but have done it without love? Is the reader going to turn to Christ? I think not.

Churches are some of the most hurtful places in the world because they contain people who stand around crowing about how they are right because it's in the Word, or who say the Lord said this or that, or how they do things is more spiritual. They may even be right but what has rightness got to do with it if you end up discouraging and hurting another believer. That's Paul's point. There were obviously some rally valuable people in Corinth, but they were negating their ministry because they placed themselves and their needs before the needs of others.

Do our actions put people off faith? Do we discourage others? It doesn't matter how spiritual we think we are, how long we have been a Christian, how encyclopedic our knowledge of the Bible is, or even how mature in the faith we are – once we move outside love then we move into the flesh and what we say, do and think is probably worthless to God and to others. Look at these verses again. He was talking to people who were moving in high level gifts *gift of prophecy, fathom all mysteries and all knowledge*, (yes and even tongues!). Even being martyred for the wrong reason is a waste!

So you think this may not apply to you? Think again because Paul gives these examples to tell us that we're all guilty! What's more I've heard plenty of it here. And I daresay I've done it too. Correct it may have been but loving it certainly wasn't. And it's something we all need to repent of. If you think you have nothing to repent of maybe a relocation to Corinth may be in order?

As I said last week, repentance isn't about saying sorry - it's turning away from what we have been doing and doing things God's way. The Christian faith is not evolutionary, it's revolutionary. We have a God whose desire is to transform.

Back in the 1960s, revolution usually meant one thing - Marxist revolution - "workers of the world unite". People sought to overthrow the existing order and people feared the word "revolution" as people associated it with the Russian Revolution, the Maoist Revolution, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, the cold War and the rest of it. George Verwer of OM took that term and saw the significance of the word in the NT. It's all over it. It's the Greek word *metanoia* - it means to turn around, be transformed and it also means repent. It's where we also get the term metamorphosis - being changed from one thing to another. Turn around - what does a car wheel do? It turns around. It revolves. Each time you go for a drive it is a revolutionary event!

George Verwer saw that this word "transform" meant "revolution". God wants revolutionary change to come into our lives. Being a Christian is about revolution. We are not called upon to be challenged to say "sorry" we are called on to be transformed, changed, revolutionised.

If you are being transformed then you are being revolutionised, changed. But from what into what? You have to be metamorphosed from one thing to another, rather like a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. Verwer calls it a Revolution of Love. We are turned from selfish to selfless. From where we are into the imitation of Christ and imitating His love and His life.

As we read 1 Corinthians 13 this morning God is saying be changed. Maybe you accepted this call once before and slipped back - God can transform you anew because the forgiveness of Christ is as valid as it's ever been. Changed from what we are into this description:

Mark is patient, Mark is kind. He does not envy, he does not boast, he is not proud. 5 He is not rude, he is not self-seeking, he is not easily angered, he keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Mark does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Mark never fails.

What will that revolution do. It will point us in two directions - to loving God and to loving others. What will the result be. To God it will be that desire to seek His face I was talking about last week. To others it will be a desire to see people who are lost come to Christ.

This world in which we live is a sick world. It is a world of misery and tragedy such as most of us cannot begin to imagine. Millions are sleeping on pavements, starving to death, knowing nothing of the love of God for them. The church sings, "My Jesus, I love thee." And at the same time 150,000 people a day slip away into eternity. And we say that we love them. I say we don't. If we loved them with Christ's love, we wouldn't stop until we had sold a million books and distributed 100 million tracts. And as we did it our tears would bathe these lost souls. I know too little about it. I have wept little over souls and much over my unloving heart. But I can say today before God, "I WANT IT!" You can take all that I have! You can take my family (and I do not say this lightly), BUT I WANT A LIFE OF LOVE! I WANT GOD! (George Verwer)

When the revolution of love comes in our lives, we'll see that revolution in the lives of people in Swaffham. Many of you long after revival. It will come when we repent. Yes us. It will come as we seek His face and we desire what is on God's heart - the redemption of the human race 2 Pet 3:9 - for God does not desire that any should perish, but that all come to repentance.

Is that your heart. There is a good modern chorus that unfortunately we don't know, but it says this

WE'RE LOOKING TO YOUR PROMISE of old,
*That if we pray and humble ourselves,
You will come and heal our land,
You will come,
You will come.*

*We're looking to the promise You made,
That if we turn and look to Your face,
You will come and heal our land,
You will come,
You will come to us.*

*Lord, send revival, start with me.
For I am one of unclean lips,
And my eyes have seen the King;
Your glory I have glimpsed.
Send revival, start with me.*

(Matt Redman)

