

Known By Love

(Preached at Footscray Baptist Church on May 17th, 2020 by Cheryl Williams– Acts 17: 22-31:& John 14:15-21)

A number of years ago a young woman entered Brunswick Baptist Church and sat up the back for weeks. She saw women leading and preaching and she began to read the bible. She then became brave enough to meet with some of the women at morning tea after the service. She had arrived in Australia with her husband from Iran, so, he could study architecture. She found herself very lonely, she was a nominal Muslim. To help deal with her loneliness she contacted via email her Armenian Christian friend in Canada and asked what to do to cure her loneliness. The friend suggested she find a church that was multicultural as they would be friendly. So, using the internet she discovered the Brunswick Church.

So, she entered a place, which to her, contained an ‘unknown’ God. Slowly she got to know God, mainly by simply reading the bible and asked for Baptism. Then she and her husband attended Baptismal classes that another member and I conducted. I was sensing a change in the husband when one night he said – so what are the rules, the laws in this faith? Lost for words, initially I said – well there aren’t any. Then I added, actually there are only two – Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and Love your neighbour as yourself. Not long after he also converted and we baptised them at Easter that year.

The unknown had become known as they experienced the love of God in a little urban church.

Paul in our reading stumbles upon a statue to an ‘unknown’ God in a Greek city.

Paul who had zealously persecuted Christians had come to know the God of Jesus on the Road to Damascus. Now Paul finds himself in another foreign city but this time he wants to fill out the story for them.

Gently he fills in the gaps about this unknown God. This God is:

- The one who created the world and all that is in it
- The one who gives life and breath to mortals and all living things, the one in whom we live, move and have our being rather than residing in human-made shrines
- The one we search for and can be found, because this God is incredibly close
- The one who loves all without exception.

This God is known by love according to John. Earlier in the Gospel Jesus has given an example of love and service in the washing of his friend’s feet. Now in this chapter we find Jesus equipping them for life when he is no longer with them physically. He promises them the Holy spirit described as an advocate, or another word as another paraclete. A paraclete is one who will come alongside when times are difficult, when we struggle, they offer encouragement and reassurance, just like Jesus, the first paraclete had.

This gift, will continue to make God known, will continue to reveal the truth, will mean we are not alone, we are not orphaned. This gift is that which enables us to love, to both know love and give love. This gift will enable us to live out the commandment to love. This gift will enable us to enter into the divine love of the divine community which is God. The knowing of God revolves around love. The oneness of God is understood in terms of love. Love of others is a sign of abiding in the love of God. The security of God's love enables us to love others.

In our current climate I wonder how the love of God is made know to you?

- A gentle smile as you pass by another in the supermarket
- An offer to shop for you
- A nurse holding the hand of the dying
- Listening and watching a virtual choir on the internet
- Comedians making us laugh at ourselves
- Poets and singers putting into words that which is too deep for us to express
- Children sending messages

I wonder how you might be experiencing the paraclete sent by Jesus. Is it by:

- Immersing yourself in sacred writings
- Praying differently
- Sharing insights with others

In difficult times where are you finding encouragement, reassurance and comfort?

- Reconnecting with old friends
- Positive messages on TV, facebook etc.

There are many around us who are struggling and despondent. Many without work, many without people they can gather with, many searching for purpose, many worried about going out and about in the next little while, many whose mental health conditions have been exacerbated, many without money.

God calls us to love others, that is at the core of all the commandments. Love is at the core of Jesus teaching, living and dying. Loving is how the unknown God is made known.

How can we in a restricted world share that love with others, how might we be a source of comfort, reassurance and encouragement to those around us? John's answer is simple – love.

Michael Leunig has some helpful and challenging things to say about love. Let me share some of these with you.

There are only two feelings.

Love and fear.

There are only two languages.

Love and fear.

There are only two activities.

Love and fear.
There are only two motives,
two procedures, two frameworks,
two results.
Love and fear.
Love and fear.

“Love one another and you will be happy, it is as simple and as difficult as that”

In conclusion then,

- Let us give thanks that God is not unknown.
- Let us give thanks for the gift of the Spirit or paraclete that reveals more and more of God.
- Let us give thanks for the one who offers us comfort and reassurance.
- Let us not fear, instead love no matter how difficult that might be.
- If you love me says the God we have come to know, you will keep my commandments. And my commandments are to love, to love God and to love neighbour.

Amen.