

Love Makes Us Real

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on March 14th, 2021 – John 3: 14-21 & I Cor 13:1-13)

You may have read the children's story 'The Velveteen Rabbit' when you were a child. It is a story about a little boy who receives for Christmas a velveteen rabbit. Initially the boy doesn't take much notice of the rabbit, so the rabbit ends up in the toy box with all the other toys. Here, an older toy, the Skin Horse offers the rabbit some words of wisdom. Skin Horse tells the rabbit what it is like to be real. "When a child loves you for a really long time and plays with you and wears you out, then you become Real." The Velveteen Rabbit, would like that one day. One night the boy's nanny gives him the rabbit to sleep with and they become friends. After a time of loving the rabbit, the boy tells his nanny that the rabbit is Real. One day outside playing with the boy, some wild rabbits appear, but they soon run away when they realise the Velveteen Rabbit isn't like them. When the boy gets sick with scarlet fever the Velveteen Rabbit is with him through his recovery, until, the day the boy is about to go to the seaside. It is decided that the rabbit needed to be burned as it was full of germs. In the midst of his sadness a fairy appears and tells the rabbit he was already real to the little boy and she could make him real to everyone. With her help, he is soon hopping around with the wild rabbits. Later the boy is out playing in the woods and spots some wild rabbits, one of them, however, looks very familiar – Velveteen Rabbit had come back to find his friend who had helped him become Real.¹

Love makes you Real.

Our reading, from the gospel of John, is perhaps, the best known verse, from the bible – John 3:16, we can all recite it can't we? For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that all who believe in him might have eternal life.

From beginning to end God showers the world in love – at creation, in Jesus and with the Spirit.

God's love in Jesus is an act of solidarity. Giving of God's very self in Jesus, God enters our world, our situation, our experience. An act of humility, becoming like us. An act of giving without receiving. A choice. An act risking rejection. A life of loving that pays the ultimate price, death on the cross. The cross - the result of loving the unlovable, loving those considered outsiders, loving them enough to break rules and religious conventions.

Love makes us Real.

Paul tells us in our other reading what love looks like. This reading has traditionally been used at weddings but in reality, it is a message for the community of the spirit, the church, us. Our life together should be characterised by a love that is patient; a love that is kind; a love that is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. A love that does not insist on its own way; a love that is not irritable or resentful; a love that does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. A love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. A love that mirrors God's love.

Love makes us Real.

¹ <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/velveteen-rabbit/summary>

A love that tells people they are equal, that they don't need to do anything to receive such love, they are worthy just because they are. In God's eyes, we are always somebody.

And if we are loved like that, we can do nothing else but be love to others. However, the story of Jesus also tells us that loving and being loved like this is risky. Risky because of where it might lead us. Love like God's is never just a feeling or emotion, it always results in action.

Down through the ages, living a life of love has led to many people really following in the footsteps of Jesus and putting their lives in danger.

I can still see Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the era of apartheid, a tiny man dressed in his purple at the front of a protest march, ready to put his life on the line.

Or Martin Luther King Jr, who fatally takes a bullet because he makes a stand for love. A love that says all are equal and all are worthy. A love that dreams that one day children no matter their colour might walk in unity and have the same opportunities – unfortunately we still wait for that dream to come true.

In recent days you may have seen the image of the nun in Myanmar who knelt with two policemen and pleaded with them to stop shooting protestors. She begged them not to hurt the protestors but to treat them kindly, like family members. She told them they could kill her but she would not stand up until they gave their promise to not brutally hurt protestors. They lied, she tried to save some of the victims but then she was blinded by tear gas. She said, 'our clinic floor became a sea of blood. We need to value life. It made me feel so sad.' Love is risky but it is God's way.

Locally, there is a group called 'Love Makes A Way' that quietly protests the detention of asylum seekers. They gather outside hotels or offices and pray and sing and carry signs. Recently some of those detainees have been released and given visas. Maybe love indeed does make a way.

Love makes us Real, loving also makes us Real.

Our reality is that we are always, and in every way, the beloved, beloved by God, because that is the nature of God. God is love.

Our local cartoonist Michael Leunig says a few things about love:

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.

And then he says – Love one another and you will be happy. It's as simple and as difficult as that.

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Paul says: And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Skin horse says - “When a child loves you for a really long time and plays with you and wears you out, then you become Real.”

As we move through Lent let us remember that God so loved the world, he gave his only Son. Loved us to the moon and back and more.

Amen.