

A moment or two of Love

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on December 21st 2025, Advent 4 (Matthew 1:18-25))

A moment or two of Love

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on December 21st 2025, Advent 4 (Matthew 1:18-25))

On Sunday afternoon last week, an Ukrainian couple got out of their car, perhaps intending to join the Hanukkah festivities in the park. They noticed something amiss and tried to stop a crazed gunman before his anger and hate could be unleashed. They laid their lives on the line for many others and paid the ultimate price. They didn't think about politics or religious and ethnic differences, they simply acted out of love for others. Not long after, a Syrian man who just happened to be Muslim, was out and about, perhaps he just wanted to enjoy himself with his family at the beach. He saw one of the gunmen, in the middle of his shooting rampage, and when he could see an opportunity, he caught the gunman by surprise, tackled him and wrestled a gun from him, he too laid his life on the line for countless others, he received a number of bullet wounds but survived. These three people were among the heroes on Sunday who did not stop to think about religious, political or social differences, they only thought to show love for their fellow human beings.

Jesus said, there is no greater love than when one lays down his life for another.

How on earth do we process this and make sense of such a tragedy, especially as we prepare ourselves to celebrate our religious festival of Christmas?

I wonder if the story of Joseph might help us process our responses to such a complex, confusing and shocking event.

Joseph was engaged to a young girl called Mary. He came from a family that could trace its heritage all the way back to King David and beyond. He was described as a righteous man. By trade a carpenter. Mary comes to him with some news, that she has had some kind of an encounter with a messenger from God, who told her she would have a child. A child of whom Joseph is not the father. This is scandalous, an unmarried teenager pregnant with a child whose father is not the man she is engaged to. What a predicament Joseph finds himself in. What should he do? The law would give him permission to separate from Mary and not go through with the marriage. Such a decision would expose her and her family to scandal and more importantly probably lead Mary to being stoned to death for her 'indiscretion'.

No doubt after much thought and prayer, Joseph makes a decision. A decision that is courageous and counter cultural. He makes a decision that will ensure Mary has not just dignity, but care and support in the years ahead. A decision that Mary would not be shamed for the rest of her days. He makes a decision, based on love.

It seems to me that Joseph puts aside any thoughts about who is to blame for this, about what is the respectable thing to do, about his own rights, and he puts aside his own confusion and anxiety. Instead, he makes a decision where he puts another first. A decision where he puts his own reputation in jeopardy. A decision he comes to after his own encounter with his God. A decision based on love.

This love is costly love, the same kind of love shown by many on Sunday at Bondi.

A moment or two of Love

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on December 21st 2025, Advent 4 (Matthew 1:18-25))

Love that puts the welfare and safety of others before themselves.
Love that takes courage.
Love that does not seek to blame.
Love that does not play politics.
Love that is not beholden to fear.
Love that liberates.
Love that is vulnerable.
Love that crosses the artificial boundaries of culture, gender, politics, religion and social status.
Love that chooses kindness instead of cruelty.
Love that is compassionate.
Love that is costly.
Love that is humane.
Love that he can't help but live by.

We saw that love on show by a Ukrainian couple and a Syrian man on Sunday. Love that is the very essence of our shared humanity.

As we look to our faith, especially at this time of the year, we look to a God who is love, a God who is with us in all the trials and tribulations of life. We call Jesus, Emmanuel, which means God with us.

I am reminded of one of Michael Leunig's sayings,

*'Love is born
With a dark and troubled face
When hope is dead
And in the most unlikely place
Love is born:
Love is always born.'*¹

And in case you are struggling to hear what I am saying today, here it is in poetic form.

Love isn't tidy.
Love isn't pink hearts and glitter glue.
Love isn't the soft-focus ending of a film where everyone smiles on cue.
Love is fire that warms and scorches.
Love is the prophet's cry for justice.
Love is Hosea choosing faithfulness again.
Love is Ruth walking dusty roads with Naomi and refusing to leave her alone.
Love is Mary saying yes with a trembling voice and Joseph staying when everything felt impossible.
Love is stubborn.
Love is costly.
Love pulls you to your feet when you'd rather hide in the shadows.
Love cracks open the guarded places and refuses to let fear rule.
God is love
so, to live in love is to live in God
and to live in God is to live in love.
That holy looping truth circling us like smoke.

¹ From *The Prayer Tree*, Michael Leunig. (Collins Dove 1991)

A moment or two of Love

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on December 21st 2025, Advent 4 (Matthew 1:18-25))

Love has hands that wash weary feet.
Love has eyes that see the overlooked.
Love has knees that kneel beside the broken.
Love has a spine that won't bow to injustice.
Love crosses boundaries, sits with the Samaritan woman, calls Zacchaeus down from the tree, feeds the crowds who didn't bring lunch and still gathers the leftovers so nothing and no one is wasted.
Love risks.
Love remains.
Love waits at tombs in early morning light.
Love speaks your name in the garden.
Love breaks bread with doubtful friends and offers peace again and again.
This is the love we're asked to grow into.
Ragged love.
Resilient love.
Love that bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.
Not cheap.
Not easy.
Not sentimental.
Holy love.
Refusing to give up on us.
Calling us to give ourselves away for a world that aches for love.²

As we move slowly toward Christmas, and as we try to make sense of the events of the past week, may we live the love that God reached out into the world to give. Love that casts out fear, that does not seek to blame, that sees the image of God in every face, that doesn't play politics or look for easy answers, that refuses to give into hatred and division, love that shows compassion and kindness first.

Let love shine in the darkness. Amen.

² Poem found on Facebook, Dec 2025 by © E Hamilton 2025