

Being in love - 4th Oct 2009
(to follow *Falling in Love*)
St George's Anglican Church

OT Deuteronomy 10:12-22
Epistle Ephesians 1:15-23
Gospel John 15:9-17

The more I live with faith in God, the more I realise that being a Christian is about being in love. Our relationship with God is best understood as a love affair and if we try to live out our faith as a duty, obligation, or habit – we will miss a vital dimension, and that is that when we are in love our primary motivation is to pleasure our lover and that's not duty, obligation or habit. When we live in a relationship where there is love, we will want to bring more beauty and trust to it that so that we can be confident to step further into it and discovery deeper and richer things about it. It'll be very clear to us as to how we ought to live in the relationship. We will want to bless the other and be blessed by the other and we will want to honour and acknowledge the love that is given to us.

The relationship will be full of life, and it will be dynamic in that it won't be static or standing still – it will be moving and in a way which will be making it stronger and stronger. So when we are encouraged to remember the beginnings of our love and how it all began, we mustn't fall into the trap of wanting to have those beginning experiences over again, because we ought to have moved and be in a stronger and richer place.

The Ephesian Church was criticised by the Spirit for forsaking or growing distant from its *first love* (Rev 2:4), and was warned that it should repent, yet it was a good church. It was known for its good deeds, hard work, perseverance, endurance of hardship, vigilance, protection of the truth and intolerance of ungodliness. What on earth was wrong with it ? What was it lacking that meant it was under a warning that the presence of Christ would be removed from it (see Rev 2:5 - reference to the *lampstand*, which represents the presence of Christ and stamps the church as belonging to Christ). The Church would die. What had happened was that it had become preoccupied and focussed on being a theological vigilante, a protector of the truth and good doctrine, and standing stoically and sternly against the tide of secularism. There was a lot of need for all these characteristics

in Ephesus, church history tells us, but in being so anxious, it had forgotten that the reason for its existence was founded in a beautiful life giving relationship of love and nurture with God through Christ their Saviour. The language of their loss is very strong. They had completely abandoned their *first fine flush of enthusiastic love* (Revelation: Leon Morris, IVP) - they had drifted, and they were "doing church" out of duty, obligation, habit and perhaps even out of pride. They no longer remembered how it all began. They were doing the same thing all the time.

A while ago I went back to a church one Sunday after being absent for 6 years. It was a church that I had previously attended and even been quite involved in, and when I walked in the door after all that time away, I was accosted by a person who was obviously having trouble with duty rostering (someone not turning up) and asked if I would attend to a duty in the service. There was an immediate sense that nothing had changed. It was as if I had never been away and the 6 years that had elapsed hadn't seen any movement change or challenge. There was no new life and the church was doing exactly what it had been 6 years before; very faithfully but lifelessly.

We need to hold in our memory and keep remembering the wonder of our first love. If we drift away from this our mission will die and indeed we will fail to be Christ's church in our society. Remember St Paul in 1 Cor 13 – without love we are only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal (vs 1). The absence of love would be fatal and indeed the Church in Ephesus did die.

The love relationship surpasses duty and obligation. It is the power by which behaviour, conduct and the actions of our lives are inspired and driven. The beauty and value of the relationship makes it natural and effortless for us to live in a certain way. It is the factor that makes what we do a response of worship out of true willingness as opposed to discipline and command. Remember all the commandments of law and duty are fulfilled in the law of love.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

Mark 12: 30

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Galatians 5:14

Living our lives albeit faithfully out of duty and obligation but without immersion in a relationship of love will make us barren and dry and has the danger too of making us pious, thinking that we are worthy because of our obedience.

Look at what might have been for the Ephesians

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Ephesians 1:17

The Apostle is praying that above all else the people will be in a relationship with Jesus, not an ordinary humdrum relationship but one where they will get to know Him better. This is our prayer today would be that we know our Lord Jesus Christ better. Knowing someone better means that we are deepening our relationship with them and finding out more about them, and with Jesus – we will love what we discover. A relationship in which we are knowing someone better is a relationship on the move. It won't be stifled by habit, duty, obligation and repetition. It will be alive with discovery and with Jesus it will be an ongoing love affair that is renewed and revitalised at every turn. St Paul again:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:17-19

The discoveries to be found in knowing Christ by loving Him are profound. There is little that can be said to unpack this prayer. It is beyond explanation. This prayer is how to "do church".

The Ephesian church was given a rescue plan by the Spirit. They were to remember their first love, and then to repent for their loss of it, and then to act again with the deeds of love (Rev 2:5). Read St Paul again as to how we should live and the deeds of love:

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 4:32 to 5:1-2

There is nothing more beautiful than love relationship and out of a love relationship all of the understanding needed about how to live will be found.

(Story and video clip – love lost and regained)

We are a church with life. Let's ensure that Christ's lampstand is planted blazing and bright in the centre of all we do. And let us always remember that the reason for us being here is to love God, love each other and love those around us, and to enjoy the excitement challenge and blessing of a relationship with Jesus that will never go stale, will never become habit or duty and will never disappoint; but more than all of that, is a relationship that will continue to change us into His likeness by drawing us more deeply into knowledge of Jesus and the beauty of His love without end.

Stan Thorburn