

Sunday 16th February 2020 Grahamstown Cathedral 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		Epiphany 6 – Year A
Deut 30:15-20	Ps 119:1-8	1 Cor 3:1-9
		Matthew 5:21-37
WHERE DO I FIND LOVE?		

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut 30:19).

THE BIG QUESTIONS OF LIFE

The news reached us late on Sunday evening last week, that the Bishops of our Province (ACSA) had elected The Ven Joshua Louw, of the diocese of Cape Town, to be Bishop of Table Bay and suffragan-bishop of Cape Town. We pray for him and his family as they prepare for this new ministry. Thank you to all who offered prayers for this process, and for love and support throughout.

We continue today with a three-part sermon series on “Big Questions”, big issues. This series is particularly drawn up with students in mind, and so I take this opportunity once again to welcome students to the Cathedral, either as first years, or as returning students. It is good to see you!

Last week was “Where do I find light?” – Does God exist? Next week, the Sunday before Lent (Transfiguration Sunday), is “Where do I find hope?” – dealing with anxiety and stress and depression.

Our big question today is “Where do I find love?” – all the questions around relationships, love, marriage, intimacy, trust, commitment, and what is God’s picture and purpose for us in all this.

Today is the Sunday closest to Valentine’s Day, and in that spirit I offer to you a Lower Albany Valentine’s Day poem:

Roses are red
Violets are blue
I love biltong
And so do you!

A recent Facebook meme: ‘Valentine’s Day Special. Introduce your wife to your girlfriend! Brought to you by Dove’s Funeral Home.’

Where do I find love?

It is important that we acknowledge the context for this sermon:

... the profound longing within each one of us, for love and relationship and friendship; the complexities and journey to finding true love: the joys and sorrows, heartaches, delight...

...the dark side to love and romance – gender-based violence and sexual abuse, the pain and sadness of divorce and family breakdown; one-night stands and casual pickups...sexual encounters blurred by alcohol or drugs

when the girl wakes up and doesn't know where she is or what happened, except that she has been raped...

...then we have the glorious love stories in scripture and literature and music: Adam and Eve, Romeo and Juliet, Chris de Burgh *Lady in Red*; the film *Love Actually* with its opening lines "If you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling you'll find that love actually ... is ... all around"; the film *Titanic* with a great love affair at the heart of it all...

...shifting gender identity, emerging validity and recognition of same-sex relationships and long-term partners, different from the traditional understanding of marriage, yet bearing many of the marks of marriage: love, faithfulness, commitment...

...our own experiences of love received and given: love from parents, siblings, friends, colleagues, partners; sometimes we find and receive love and happiness in the most unexpected places!

So the question "where do I find love?" has an immediate and easy answer: "All around. Everywhere."

However, in a town such as ours, seething with teenagers and students, young adults, the question "where do I find love?" is usually linked to romantic love. Where do I find love? Two young people meet, and they ask themselves... is this the one? Should I shoot my shot? Should I make a move? It's an immensely exciting and also terrifying time of one's life. Then there are those of us who are a great

deal older, who watch the dating game with happy memories, and also anxiety... how much we hope and pray that our children, grandchildren, our young people, will find love and happiness. Part of the confusion in the love that is all around us is that we forget what love actually is.

Professor Chris Mann's song¹ reminds us:

Love, love is patient,
Love is kind,
Love's a guardian angel
Whisp'ring in the mind.

Love, love is gentle,
Love is strong,
Love sparks joy and justice,
Doesn't dwell on wrong.

Love, love is costly
Love has a price,
Call it being unselfish,
Call it sacrifice.

So there is love, but there is also a cost to it; love offers healing and stability, but those who love are called to be patient, kind, unselfish.

¹ *The Deep, Deep Sweet of Love* © Chris Mann 2020

THE SCRIPTURES

What do the scriptures say? Is there a clear answer? An easy blue print? A ready-made design for love? Does God have a plan for all this?

Deuteronomy 30

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut 30:19).

The general principle – find what God wants, and do it, and you shall have life.

Genesis 1 & 2

“so God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them...” (Gen 1:27)

“Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” (Gen 2:24-25)

Some point to these verses and suggest that the marriage relationship and the family is the earliest structure, the earliest unit, given to us – and given by God: it predates the tribe or the nation, it predates the church, the community of faith. And many say that the family is the building block of

all that is to follow, all of society; that stable families make for a stable community, healthy children, balanced and competent adults.

Many of our schools are finding the need to offer levels of love and support and nurture to school children, love and support and nurture that children should be receiving at home. Schools and social workers spend a great deal of energy picking up the pieces of broken homes and broken families. In some cases, families do live in the same house, under the same roof, but they are places of violence and rage and abuse and neglect. Yet there are also thousands of families and households where children are loved and protected and cared for, and are given the stable environment that they need.

Time forbids exploring the models of marriage and family life in the Old Testament, in its good times and bad – David and Bathsheba, Solomon with 700 wives and his 300 concubines...

New Testament references – e.g. “a bishop or deacon should be the husband of only one wife” (1 Tim 3:2);

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial...The body is not meant for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body...Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? ... Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the fornicator sins against the body itself” Or do you not know that your body is a

temple of the Holy Spirit within you... therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:12-20).

“Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers” (Heb 13:4).

Matthew 5:

“You have heard it said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’ [Ten Commandments, Ex 20:14]. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:27-28).

AND SO... WHERE DO I FIND LOVE?

There are a number of strands that we can draw from this:

1. Body and spirit

Love and sex are linked. Our bodies and our spirits are connected. We are what we do. Holy people are to live holy lives. It does matter what we do with our bodies (1 Cor 6).

2. Hold marriage in high regard

Protect and respect marriage. Faithfulness is key. The promises that a couple make before God are important.

The priest asks the groom and the bride: “Will you love, comfort, honour and protect her/him, and, forsaking all

others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?”
The answer: I will.

It is a profoundly holy and important moment. The couple make their promises before God. Let’s regain and restore marriage to its rightful place. It is “a gift of God and a means of grace, in which man and woman become one flesh”².

3. Conversion of the heart

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus is calling us to a deeper conversion: from obedience to the law to a conversion of the heart, an inner holiness of eyes and heart. We are invited to a radical conversion, particularly in this vital area of our lives, our personal relationships, our love lives (Matt 5:27-38).

4. An ethic of relationship

Many object very strongly indeed to the church or anyone else telling them how to behave in their bedrooms, in their intimate relationships. The Anglican Communion has become quite deeply divided in its stance on same-sex relationships.

ACSA and the Anglican Communion is part of the debate about the place of same-sex relationships: are they of God? Should they be blessed? Should those in same-sex unions

² *An Anglican Prayer Book 1089*, 461

be allowed to minister in the church, and be ordained? We as the church are not of one mind on this.

I suggest that we need an ethic of relationship. Faithfulness, mutual respect, trust, honesty, love, commitment, bringing out the best in the other...these are some of the things that make up a sound relationship. Let us work on these.

CONCLUSION

All love comes from God who is the source of all love. We find love in the heart of God. The love we share with one another is a reflection of God's love. We return to God to find our place of light and love and belonging.

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Dean of Grahamstown
February 2020