

Love

4 5 14

Almighty Father,
who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples
with the sight of the risen Lord:
give us such knowledge of his presence with us,
that we may be strengthened and sustained
by his risen life
and serve you continually in righteousness and truth.

My text may be found in today's Psalm, Psalm 116 and verse 1:

'I love the Lord . . .'

Back in 1968, did you see the film of Lionel Bart's musical, 'Oliver' ? Do you remember a young, blond, vulnerable Mark Lester plaintively singing, 'Where is love ?' Do you remember what was written in large, bold letters on the wall of the workhouse dining room above the orphaned boys who file in singing:

'Is it worth the waiting for ?

Will we live till 84 ?

All we ever get is gruel !

This morning, I'd like to consider briefly not what it means for God to love us but what it might mean for us to love him.

On the road to Emmaus, today's gospel from Luke chapter 24, two disciples, Cleopas and his companion, meet the risen Lord Jesus without knowing who he is or recognising him until they arrive at their village, invite the stranger in to eat with them and then, as he blesses the bread and breaks it, their eyes are opened and they know exactly who has just vanished from the room ! And one says to the other: **'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us ?'** (v32) That sense of excitement, the metaphor of burning, of being on fire in the presence of the one who is so very special to you, is a good way to start to understand what it means to love.

That the Psalmist can say, **'I love the Lord'**, should come as no surprise given that the psalms, a treasury of poetry and song, contain the whole range of our response to a God who loves us enough to give us life and breath and to sustain us in this our brief life. To love God is to be aware of him and his presence in our lives. To love him is to want to be with him. Aware of his presence, to want spend time with him. Conscious of his love, to want to be in touch with him. To be in the presence of the one we love is to be energised by him, to be filled with a desire to respond to the way we feel he feels for us.

So when, after an alfresco breakfast on the shores of Lake Galilee, the risen Lord Jesus three times asks Peter if he loves him, I wonder exactly what you think this might mean. In the context of a charcoal fire whose smell must have reminded Peter of the night he betrayed Jesus by denying him three times, to say 'Yes Lord, I love you' is a chance for Peter to be forgiven, to be restored to a right relationship with Jesus, to reaffirm what Peter truly feels for him – his desire to be

with him, to be his companion, to eat with him and to be energised by his positive presence in his life. So what does Jesus say ? He tells Peter to tend and to feed his sheep.

The challenge of Christianity is for us to do the same. It starts with the recognition that God loves us in general and me – i.e. you – in particular. It is coming to see that he knows better than we know ourselves and that we can and should respond to that love. And what do we need to do if we can say “Yes Lord, I do love you ?” We need to love others even as we ourselves are loved. And that, my friends, is essentially what the Christian life is all about.

So my challenge to us today is to reflect on how best in practice we can all reflect the words of the psalmist which are our text today:

‘I love the Lord . . .’

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

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G: Sermons 29 : Love

