

Sanctuary First

March 2013

Theme Summary

“Love Actually”

Scripture Focus: John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

The Background

The author of John's Gospel is never named, but he describes himself as "the beloved disciple" or "the disciple whom Jesus loved". (John 13:23; 21:7). We have the sense of a man overwhelmed by the love of God revealed in this man Jesus. The new life that Jesus offers is the very life of the God of love which has revealed to us and is to be expressed among us. The best evidence - the mark of authenticity - that Jesus makes a difference is the love that people see among his followers. For this rising generation authenticity is essential. It is often said that today belonging comes before believing.

Focus

- Core element of passing our faith on to the next generation - faith received and passed on
- Context suitable for people with little background in church of Christian Faith. Check our assumptions of knowledge (tell the stories) and behaviour (interactive); lead people into prayerful experience of God (five senses)

Setting the Scene

Basins and towels with jugs of warm water

A large Cross at the centre

Images of people who have made tough decisions because they care e.g. to serve in areas of poverty, to foster children, to forgive, to give up a comfortable life

Signposts to divergent paths marked out by ribbons or nightlights

Background music - "Love is all around"

Note: The materials suggested here may be used throughout the season of Lent/Easter rather than be compressed into a single act of worship.

PRESENTER	<p>In the English language, the word "love" is used in a whole host of ways from loving your wife or husband through loving ice cream or your favourite band.</p> <p>In the world of ancient Greece there were different words for different kinds of love - 'philia' for friendship, 'storge' for family bonds and 'eros' for romantic or sexual love.</p> <p>The first Christians invented a new word for the love - the word 'agape' which might be translated as "undefeatable goodwill" - not so much an emotion as a choice, a stance we take towards others.</p> <p>This love was used for the love of God - "God so loved the world that he gave his One and Only Son....."</p> <p>God makes that choice - that commitment toward us and his world.</p> <p>A book of cartoons appeared some ago called "Love is...." In one cartoon, the little lady is seen cleaning the bath, with the caption - "Love is cleaning the bathtub after him." It was followed by a picture of a little man cleaning the bath, with the caption, "Love is cleaning your own bathtub!"</p>
CHOICES CARTOONS	Time to smile at some choices
READING	John 13:34-35
PRESENTER	<p>Jesus' made that statement at the end of a remarkable incident on the last night of Jesus' life when he is in the Upper Room with his disciples. They are about to eat their last meal together. There should have been a servant on hand to wash their feet before they reclined at the table. Jesus shocked them by washing taking up the towel and the basin and washing their feet one by one.</p>
STORY TELLER 1	<p>One person tells the story in their own words, while moving round the group with basin and towel, gently washing people's hands. The story should bring out Peter's protest and the point that Jesus makes at the end. "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet."</p>
FOOT/HAND WASHING	<p>Have a number of basins and towels and invite people to go round and wash the hands or feet of a person they appreciate in a special way. During the action, the "washer" may speak words of encouragement or say a short prayer of blessing.</p>

SONG	"A New Commandment"
STORY TELLER 2	<p>A little synagogue that was due to close. The quorum for a synagogue is ten men, but there were only three men left, A Rabbi was sent to talk to them. He asked why they were still there.</p> <p>"We are waiting for Messiah," they said. "</p> <p>"Messiah has already come," he said.</p> <p>"Really, where is he?", they asked.</p> <p>"He is here. He is one of you," he replied.</p> <p>"Which one?", they asked</p> <p>"I'm not telling you!", he said, with a wink and a smile.</p> <p>And he left.</p> <p>The three men started treating each other as though each was the Messiah. People started attending the synagogue because everyone was treated as though they were the Messiah.</p>
PRESENTER	<p>If we want to buy a car or a new sofa, we go to a showroom and look around. If we want to buy a house in a new estate, we visit the show house to see the style and standard of their houses.</p> <p>The church is meant to be the showroom where people pick up on God's design for the world -a world where love reigns supreme.</p> <p>Love is the evidence that God is present.</p>
READING	John 13:34.35
FILM CLIP	<p>Option 1: "The Last Temptation of Christ" was a controversial film which suggested that the Jesus was tempted to come down from the Cross, and go off and marry Mary Magdalene.</p> <p>Option 2: "The Passion" captures the final scenes of Jesus's life. We meet him in the Garden of Gethsemane where agonises over the choice of taking the way of the Cross - the way of God's love for the world.</p>
DISCUSSION	<p>How did you feel as you watched Jesus wrestling with his choice? What does it say about making the choice to love? When have you had to make tough choices to love somebody?</p>
PRESENTER	<p>Encourage people to sign up for the 40 day challenge throughout Lent. You can sign up via the Sanctuary First website, www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk to receive a daily challenge by text or email or you can text the word LENT to 07937 947 555</p>
SONG	When I needed a neighbour?

PRESENTER	Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist who was imprisoned in Auschwitz. During that time he came to the conviction that a person would find meaning in the most extreme situations where there was love.
STORY TELLER 4	The story of Viktor Frankl finding meaning even in the concentration camp. (see attached)
SONG	Make me a channel of your peace
PRESENTER	But where is God in these extreme situations? Has he abandoned us? Has his love failed us?
STORY TELLER 5	The Long Silence (see attached)
SONG	How deep the Father's love for us

Viktor Emil Frankl

The Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist who founded The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy based on his experiences as a prisoner of war in the concentration camp at Auschwitz.

The following note is taken from the Wikipedia entry.

Liberated after three years in concentration camps, Frankl returned to Vienna. During 1945 he wrote his world-famous book titled *Trotzdem Ja Zum Leben Sagen: Ein Psychologe Erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (translated: "...Saying Yes to Life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp", known in English by the title *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959). In this book, he described the life of an ordinary concentration camp inmate from the objective perspective of a psychiatrist.

After enduring the suffering in these camps, Frankl validated his hallmark conclusion that even in the most absurd, painful and dehumanised situation, life has potential meaning and that therefore even suffering is meaningful. This conclusion served as a strong basis for his logotherapy and existential analysis, which Frankl had described before WWII.

An example of Frankl's idea of finding meaning in the midst of extreme suffering is found in his account of an experience he had while working in the harsh conditions of the Nazi's concentration camps:

We stumbled on in the darkness, over big stones and through large puddles, along the one road leading from the camp. The accompanying guards kept shouting at us and driving us with the butts of their rifles. Anyone with very sore feet supported himself on his neighbor's arm. Hardly a word was spoken; the icy wind did not encourage talk. Hiding his mouth behind his upturned collar, the man marching next to me whispered suddenly: "If our wives could see us now! I do hope they are better off in their camps and don't know what is happening to us."

That brought thoughts of my own wife to mind. And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another up and onward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise.

A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth – that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love.

I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honourable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfilment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, "The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory." (Man's Search for Meaning pp 36,37)

The Long Silence

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly – not with cringing shame but with belligerence.

'Can God judge us? How can he know about suffering?' snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. 'We endured terror, beatings, torture, death.'

In another group a black boy lowered his collar. 'What about this?' he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn: 'Lynched for no other crime than being black!'

In another crowd was a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes. 'Why should I suffer?' she murmured. 'It wasn't my fault.'

Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he had permitted in this world. 'How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred! What did God know of all that we had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life,' they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he or she had suffered most. A Jew, a black, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic and a thalidomide child. In the centre of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever.

Before God could be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth – as a man.

Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind when he tries to do it. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges. Be tried by a prejudiced judge. Let him be tortured.

At last let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die. Let him die so that there can be no doubt that he died. Let there be a whole host of witnesses to verify it.

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled.

When the last had finished pronouncing sentence there was a long silence.

No one uttered another word. No one moved.

For suddenly all knew that God had already served his sentence.

Bob Moffett