**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**August 23rd – The 11th Sunday after Trinity**

**‘Love Is….’ (Romans 12:9-21)**

*Dear Friends,*

*I hope you’re all doing very well.*

*I have some exciting, good news for you - we’re finally going to have services in at least some of our Cranmer Group church buildings from next Sunday!*

***You’re very warmly invited to join us for a service of Holy Communion at St. Thomas’s, Aslockton, at 10AM on Sunday, August 30th.***

*Given the length of time since we’ve had any services, we’re unsure of how many people may wish to join us and - since we have to observe social distancing measures to combat any Coronavirus risk – we’ve decided that we have to ask you,* ***if you plan to attend, please would you book your place for the service, in advance. Please contact Jade Blaylock, our Group Administrator, at*** ***thecranmergroup@gmail.com*** ***or 07526 603766, to reserve your place.*** *This will help us to fit more people into the service; help us look after you better; and hopefully avoid us having to turn anyone away.*

*We’ll send out information in advance of the service to let you know what to expect, since it will have to be a bit different from a ‘normal’ service. At this stage, we plan to hold Holy Communion services on a rotating basis in the Group’s three largest churches - Aslockton, Whatton (6th Sept.) and Orston (13th Sept.) - but will send out more details after the Aslockton service on Aug 30th. Do please keep us in your prayers at this challenging but exciting time.*

*Best wishes, God bless, and hope to see you in person next Sunday!*



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The Lord be with you **And also with you.**

**The Collect for The 11th Sunday after Trinity
(Common Worship)**

God of glory,
the end of our searching,
help us to lay aside all that prevents us
from seeking your kingdom,
and to give all that we have
to gain the pearl beyond all price,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ.
**Amen.**

**Love’s Redeeming Work Is Done**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Love's redeeming work is done;
Fought the fight, the battle won:
Lo, our Sun's eclipse is o’er;
Lo, he sets in blood no more!

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal:
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids his rise;
Christ has opened Paradise.

Lives again our glorious King;
Where, O Death, is now thy sting?
Dying once, he all doth save;
Where thy victory, O grave?

Soar we now where Christ has led,
Following our exalted Head;
Made like him, like him we rise;
ours the cross, the grave, the skies:

Hail the Lord of earth and heaven!
Praise to you by both be given:
The we greet triumphant now;
Hail the Resurrection thou!

Charles Wesley

**Bible Reading: Romans 12:9-21 (New International Version)**

**Read by Phil Morris

*Love in Action***

*9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality.*

*14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

*17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:*

*‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him;*

 *if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.*

*In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’*

*21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

**Sermon: ‘Love Is…’ – Rev. Tim Chambers**
I’m going to show my age a bit this morning… Do you remember the “Love is…” cartoons? When I was growing up in the 1970’s, they seemed to be absolutely everywhere – the images of an overly cute, naked couple with rather large heads, captured every time in some pose or another that demonstrated something of the supposed essence of love. With the wonders of the internet at my disposal, I’ve been able to dig out some of these classic images. “Love is…when your differences make no difference”; “Love is…being there for each other”; “Love is…babysitting the grandchildren” (I rather like that one, as I imagine Clare will too!); and, most famously, “Love is…being able to say you are sorry.”

If we indulge in a leap of the imagination, for St. Paul, “Love is… above all, action.” Perhaps, in our contemporary culture, with what seems so often to be an all-encompassing emphasis on how things and situations, jobs and relationships, all feel to us, this is an unfashionable idea. But for Paul – and indeed, this should absolutely be the same for any Christian - ‘love’ is far more about what we do, than about how we feel.

St. Paul, perhaps contrary to the bad press which he so often gets, places a strong emphasis on love in all of his letters, and the one which he addressed to the first Christians of Rome is no different.

I imagine that our passage this morning is rather less familiar to us than the quintessential wedding reading from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13: “Love is patient; love is kind; it does no envy; it does not boast”, and so on. But, in many ways, that chapter from 1 Corinthians, and our reading today from Romans 12, echo one another incredibly strongly.

In 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul talks about the body of Christ and spiritual gifts, and then follows with his famous chapter, 13, on love. Here, in Romans 12, rather more succinctly, he once again talks about the body of Christ and spiritual gifts (verses 4-8), and then, similarly, turns to the question of love, verses 9 and 10: “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.”

All actions - actions that spring out of what we looked at last Sunday, in the first eight verses of chapter 12.

There are times in the Bible when the divisions of the text into chapters and verses - which were incorporated much later to help with scholarship and referencing - are very helpful to the reader. But there are other occasions where they can have the opposite effect, of us neglecting to read more broadly than the verses upon which we’re particularly focused. For me, today’s and last Sunday’s readings definitely fall into this latter category!

In the first eight verses of chapter 12, St. Paul lays the foundations; speaking of the sacrifices and service which each one of us must make, if we are to engage in what he describes, there, as “true and proper worship” of God; as one serving in the body of Christ; the Church. And then, at the start of this morning’s reading in, verses 9 and 10, Paul pivots, around the pithiest of phrases: “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” The breaking up of chapter 12 (and indeed the Church of England’s decision to split the chapter across two Sundays worth of preaching as well!) doesn’t do us a great favour in terms of our understanding of what Paul’s trying to say here.

The two halves of chapter 12 are absolutely linked; there is no ‘split’ at the end of chapter 8, but rather there is a referencing forward from verse 1 and 2 in particular, and back from 9 and 10 into the first part of the chapter. To bring both haves together in a single phrase: “Sacrificial, transformed living calls us to love others sincerely.”

If you know God’s mercies, as spelt out by St. Paul in the first eleven chapters of Romans - much of which we’ve looked at over these last three months since Pentecost – / if you and I know God’s mercies, then (as we heard last week) you and I are to offer our bodies to God as a ‘living sacrifice’; we’re to be transformed by the Holy Spirit working in us, in order that we might know God’s will for us; and then we’re to live out what this will of God for you looks like in practice – which is, as these verses are subtitled, “Love in action”. “We love”, in the words of the first letter of St. John, “because God first loved us”, in sending his only son to die for us on the cross.

And this love in action; this Biblical love, St. Paul says, has four characteristics:

Firstly, Biblical love is without hypocrisy; it is “sincere”. The word that Paul uses here refers back to Classical Greek theatre, in which all the actors would wear masks, which signalled the role that the actor was playing. Paul is saying here that Godly love does not wear a mask; it is open; transparent; genuine. And in being so, it always acts with the motive of seeking to draw the other into the love of Christ.

Second, Biblical love is holy – “Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” You can’t really get simpler, or clearer, than that. Paul assumes that, through what he’s told us at the start of chapter 12 – not conforming ourselves to the pattern of the world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds – we’ll acquire the wisdom and a knowledge of the loving will of God, that will in turn enable us to love others, as he first loved us. But Paul’s language also tells us of the nature of the spiritual fight in which we are engaged – we are to “hate”; to reject utterly and completely, all that would try to tempt us – precisely because it can be so tempting. And we are, on the other hand, to “cling” to what is good – at times, as the enemy threatens to overwhelm us, it’s only by clinging to the shipwreck (as Paul himself in fact did) - to God’s Word; to the fellowship of His people; to the comfort of prayer - that we will find ourselves able to withstand the battering waves of the enemy around us. The spiritual battle for us is real, even if the ultimate victory has already been won for us in Christ.

Third, Biblical love must be devoted – verse 10. Paul in fact uses the word here that was taken up by some of the earliest European settlers in North America, in the foundation of their city: Philadelphia. Brotherly love. Loving in the sense in which a family does, close-knit and mutually supportive. But also loving in the way in which families love, continuing to do so in the long term, even when, at a given point in time, there may be a disagreement or falling out, which is ‘of the moment’. Such devoted love can be hard, but is so precious in the end.

So, St. Paul says that the Biblical love according to which we are called to live has these four vital characteristics:

It is sincere; it is holy; it is devoted. And, fourthly and finally, Biblical love must be selflessly humble.

“Honour one another above yourselves”, Paul writes in verse 10. He isn’t saying that we should engage in some form of mock humility or false modesty – we should all us the gifts and talents we’ve been given by God, to the best of our abilities, and to his glory – but that we should not over-estimate ourselves, and under-estimate others. As Paul writes elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 15, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain”.

Genuine, Biblical love is the most profound theme not just in today’s reading, but in this whole, wider section of Romans. Paul makes clear that it’s not just being nice to people; such love has a moral orientation away from evil, and towards the good. When we show love toward someone, we are moving them towards God's goodness. To love someone is not simply to cater to specific likes and dislikes of that person. It is rather to act toward them in ways that help them experience more of God's extraordinary goodness, that they might increasingly invite him into their lives of their own accord.

Paul gives us – in this passage, and in 1 Corinthians 13 – practical, concrete ways, in which we can extend that divine love to others, not just those to whom we are well-disposed, but to those whom we dislike; even to our enemies, as they are described. Christian love can be hard; we are called to live our lives to the standard of Jesus Christ; we are challenged, as his disciples, to follow in his footsteps.

But to do so is also to know the beauty of being a Child of God, loved by Him; to share in the joy of walking alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ, both in hardship and in plenty; and to have the privilege of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with those whom we encounter along our way.

I pray that for each one of you today, and hereafter, you will profoundly experience the presence of God in your lives, transforming you into the likeness of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. And that, in such a way, you will come to know, truly, what Biblical “Love is…”

In Jesus’s name I pray, Amen.

 **Intercessions**

**Led by Sarah Hadfield**

Lord we pray for your Church throughout the world and to ask that all religions can work in harmony together We pray for our churches in the Cranmer group, as we discuss ways to get back to services in our churches. There are many restrictions and complications, help those in charge to find a way through. Also help us to accept that things may never be as they were before.

**Lord, hear our prayer**

Lord during lockdown we noticed many things we never had time to see before, the birds, the crops blowing in the wind, the beauty of the skies and the countryside.

But we have damaged your world for our own greed and thoughtlessness. Give us wisdom to allow nature to flourish.

**Lord, hear our prayer**

We pray for the many schoolchildren who are facing confusion and uncertainty about their exam results. Some may have lost university places they had pinned their hopes on, others may have lost the chance of going to university. Lord help them in their disappointment, anger and indignation.

**Lord, hear our prayer**

We pray for our communities. We thank you for our beautiful villages, where we feel safe. We thank you for our neighbours and friends. Help us to care for them, as we would wish for them to care for us.

Look after those who at this time are uncertain, scared and anxious about the coronavirus. Help them to have faith and trust in you and keep them safe.

**Lord, hear our prayer**

Lord we thank you for bringing light to the dark times in our lives. Comfort the people who we know are in need of your presence, especially those who are sick, having treatment for cancer or other diseases or having to accept that there is no more treatment possible.

Take them in your arms Lord, and give them strength.

**Lord, hear our prayer**

Lord we pray for ourselves and our families, some of whom we may not have seen for a long time, but the love we have for them will always be there. Help us to listen to your voice and guide us in the right way.

**Lord, hear our prayer**

Teach us good Lord to pray aright, that we may be in tune with your will, in harmony with one another and at peace in our hearts and minds.

**Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**The Collect for The 11th Sunday after Trinity
(Book of Common Prayer)**

O GOD, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**Rejoice, The Lord Is King!**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**

Rejoice, the Lord is King!
Your Lord and King adore;
Mortals give thanks and sing,
And triumph evermore;
*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

Jesus, the Saviour, reigns,
The God of truth and love;
When he had purged our stains,
He took his seat above;
*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

His kingdom cannot fail;
He rules both earth and heaven;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus given;
*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

He sits at God's right hand
Till all his foes submit,
And bow to his command,
And fall beneath his feet:
*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

Rejoice in glorious hope!
Jesus the Judge shall come,
And take his servants up
To their eternal home.
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
God's trumpet call shall sound, rejoice!

Charles Wesley

**A Closing Blessing**

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you always.
**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**