



Parish of  
**St Peter Woking**  
St Peter's · St Mark's · All Souls'



## Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> February

### Welcome

### Greeting

Leader Praise God! For the Lord our God the almighty reigns!  
**All Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory.**

Leader Happy are those who have been invited  
to the wedding-feast of the Lamb.

**All Amen. Praise the Lord!**

### Hymn *I will enter His gates*

I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart  
I will enter His courts with praise  
I will say this is the day that the Lord has made  
I will rejoice for He has made me glad

He has made me glad; He has made me glad  
I will rejoice for he has made me glad  
He has made me glad; He has made me glad  
I will rejoice for he has made me glad

*Hallelujah*

*He has made me glad*

### Opening activity Wedding photos

### Confession

Leader God shows his love for us  
in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.  
Let us then show our love for him  
by confessing our sins in penitence and faith.  
Come, let us return to the Lord and say:

**All**            **Lord our God,  
in our sin we have avoided your call.  
Our love for you is like a morning cloud,  
like the dew that goes away early.  
Have mercy on us;  
deliver us from judgement;  
bind up our wounds and revive us;  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

Absolution *(we are reminded that God forgives all who repent)*

*This or another absolution may be said*

Leader        May the God of love  
bring *us* back to himself,  
forgive *us our* sins,  
and assure *us* of his eternal love  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All**            **Amen.**

Collect        *(Prayer for the day)*

Leader        Almighty Father, whose Son was revealed in majesty  
before he suffered death upon the cross:  
give us grace to perceive his glory,  
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him  
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**All**            **Amen**

Connect Group *Monday Night Connect Group*

Song            *Nothing is too big for His power*

Nothing's too big, big, big for his power  
Nothing's too little, little for his care  
Nothing's too big, big, big for his power  
Nothing's too idly, widdly for his care  
Nothing's too big, big, big for his power  
Nothing's too incy-wincy for his care  
Nothing's too big, big, big for his power

Nothing's too teeny-weeny for his care  
He is God of the big, God of the little  
God of the stuff somewhere in the middle  
The King of moving mountains  
Love's you more than you will ever know

Nothing's too big, nothing's too small  
Nothing's too much, he cares for it all

## Bible readings

*Deuteronomy 10: 12-22 – Paul Stanistreet, All Souls'*

### **Fear the LORD**

<sup>12</sup> And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

<sup>14</sup> To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. <sup>16</sup> Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. <sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. <sup>18</sup> He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. <sup>20</sup> Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. <sup>21</sup> He is the one you praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. <sup>22</sup> Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.

*1 Corinthians 13 – Sally Holcombe St Mark's*

**13** If I speak in the tongues<sup>Ⓜ</sup> of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,<sup>Ⓜ</sup> but do not have love, I gain nothing.

**4** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6** Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

**8** Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy

in part, <sup>10</sup> but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

<sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

## Sermon – Jonathan

### **Love is...**

Two antennas met on a roof, fell in love and got married. Their wedding ceremony wasn't fancy. **The reception, however, was excellent.**

What did one pickle say to the other? **You mean a great dill to me.**

Why shouldn't you fall in love with a pastry chef? **They'll dessert you.**

Apologies for those corny jokes, but we all need a bit of cheering up and it's Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day may or may not be special for you, but it is a great day to think about that most divine quality of love and it was lovely to see those wedding photos at the start of the service reminding us of the special love that is found in marriage. For today's service I chose that famous passage from 1 Corinthians 13 on love, because although I have preached on it many times at weddings and sometimes funerals I realise I have never preached on it at a Sunday service. Because it is so well-known it is often skipped over and yet is so rich in truth.

And accompanying that reading today are the words God speaks to his chosen people, through Moses, in Deuteronomy 10 as he gives them the 10 commandments and prepares them for living in the promised land as his people. In it he asks his people to love him because he has loved them and out of that love to serve and obey him for their own good. And he asks them to be like God and love the outsider, the foreigner living amongst them as we'll explore later.

We were reading 1 Corinthians day by day in Morning Prayer recently and the great thing about reading whole books of the bible is that you see things in the context in which they were written. In this section of Paul's letter to the church in Corinth Paul is addressing the issue of orderly worship when the church comes together, including the use of the supernatural gifts of the spirit. And right in the middle of a section on spiritual gifts comes this beautiful passage on love to remind the Corinthian church not to value these spiritual gifts above the most important attribute of all – love.

The English word love has a very broad range of meanings, but helpfully in ancient Greek, the language 1 Corinthians was written in, there are four main words which are translated 'love' in English. They are:

1. *Storge* – which is the unconditional family love that parents and children have for each other.
2. *Philia* – which is the love of good friends, where we get the suffix ‘phile’ from as in ‘Francophile’, lover of all things French
3. *Eros* – which is romantic love, that Valentine’s Day is all about
4. *Agape* – which is the word translated ‘love’ in 1 Corinthians 13 (or ‘charity’ in the King James version). Agape is perfect, unconditional, selfless love.

Agape is the type of love the New Testament speaks about the most, it appears over 200 times. Agape defines God's immeasurable, incomparable love for humans and how we, living as his children, should treat one another. Agape isn't born just out of emotions, feelings, familiarity, or attraction, but from the will and as a choice. Agape requires faithfulness, commitment, and sacrifice without expecting anything in return.

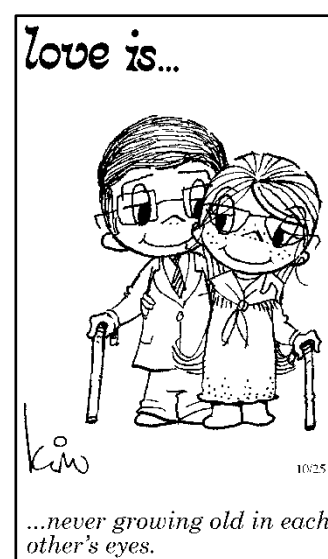
If you are of a certain generation you'll remember these ‘Love is...’ cartoons from newspapers in the 1970s which have appeared every where since. Of course Paul initiated this phrase nearly 2000 years early, but didn't copyright it or add a cartoon strip too it! “Love is patient, love is kind...” he begins as he lists what agape love is and isn't. They are definitions we can all agree on, but find much harder to live out.

I would like to use both these passages to briefly look at 4 things God has put on my heart today to say that this agape ‘Love is...’

Firstly, love is... **kind**. The bible frequently speaks of God's kindness to us in his attitudes and actions. Kindness is usually gentle, thoughtful and uplifting. A kind person thinks highly of others and will go out of their way to do things for them. A kind person will sacrifice their own desires to help someone or make them happy. Their primary purpose in life is not just to please themselves, they recognise the importance of pleasing others and hopefully many of you have received kindness from your loved one this Valentine's Day

A kind person watches their words so that they don't let their anger or frustration spill out into words that hurt others. A kind person respects other people's boundaries, they don't try and impose themselves on others. A kind person is content in who they are, knowing their identity in God, and so they don't do their acts of kindness to earn praise from God or others, as little children do. Their kind actions flow from who they are. They may sometimes have to be tough, discipline others or be ‘cruel to be kind’, but only because they know that is what is best for that person or to stop an injustice. The people we heard from in the Connect Group today spoke of people who embodied love to them and each of them, I'm sure, would have been thought of as kind.

Secondly, love is... **forgiving**. Paul says love ‘keeps no record of wrongs’. Love does not try to point score with their spouse or sibling or parent or work colleague, remembering and holding on to the wrong they have done and then pointing it out when wanting to justify



themselves. Rather love seeks to let go of the resentment that comes from being wronged, to let go of the desire for revenge or to see that person suffer. This is not easy and forgiveness often can't instantly be given, it takes time to work through, especially when the hurt caused is deep. But forgiveness is freeing and can heal a damaged relationship. That's why God forgives us in Christ, because he wants us to be reconciled with Him.

But to be forgiven by God we first have to repent, to say sorry, understanding the hurt we have caused by our sin, and then seek to live differently. And for true reconciliation to occur between humans requires the perpetrator to repent and the victim to forgive. It's really tough, but is the way of the cross.

Thirdly, love is... **for the outsider**. I find it interesting that in Deuteronomy 10 the only command God gives his people about love, apart from loving him, is to love the foreigner residing among them. People who were different from them, from a different race and probably religion, who spoke a different language, who dressed differently and ate different food, who didn't respect the same rules and customs they respected, the people who they were most likely to be afraid of.

Jesus upset the religious leaders because he mixed with outsiders, whether they were Samaritans or Roman oppressors or tax-collectors or lepers or 'sinners'. It is relatively easy to love family and friends, but how about loving your muslim neighbours with their funny traditions, the family of travellers you see at the school gate who you've never spoken to or even that posh couple down the road who never look at you when they walk past?

As sinners we were all outsiders to God, but because of his agape love he chose to meet us where we were by living amongst us and dying for us on the cross. We are called to love as we have been loved.

Finally, love is... **made to be mutual**. In Deuteronomy 10 God asks his people to love him. He will love them no matter what, but one-way love is not fulfilling for either party, love is only complete when mutual. We see one-way love in some romantic relationships where at its worst it can create stalkers, abusers, manipulators and people feeling trapped.

Agape love is unconditional - we choose to show love to someone no matter whether they show us love in return, as God does to us, but it longs for love to be returned because then it is complete and fulfilling to both parties. I think there is something of that in 1 Corinthians 13 v12 '**For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known**'. Paul recognises that the love we experience in this world is incomplete, that our love for God and others is a poor reflection of His love for us, but that in eternity that mutuality of love will be complete.

We have briefly looked at agape love, and there is so much more that could be said, so many stories that could be told of people who have shown that love. But as we finish I want to imagine what true Agape love would look like in our churches. I think in this parish we do pretty well, but there is room for improvement in all of us.

An agape church would be known for its **kindness**. People would be welcomed with a genuine smile, thanks would be given regularly to all who participate in a service; no-one would be left on their own at coffee (remember those days when we had coffee together!); conversations would lead to an offer of help or prayer when needed; criticism would be minimal and constructive; rotas would be filled with people willing to serve enabling the wardens and clergy to relax!

An agape church would be known for its **forgiveness**. When someone is offended or hurt, they express their feelings calmly and the other person acknowledges their actions and apologises. They both seek reconciliation rather than self-justification, blame or petty retribution.

An agape church would be **diverse**, no-one would be considered an outsider – from a different ethnicity, sexuality, background, age profile or even another church in the parish. Everyone would be welcomed and treated equally as family, from their perspective, not just ours.

And finally in an agape church love would be **mutual**. There wouldn't be a few people serving the life of the church and others primarily being consumers. Everyone would use their gifts according to what they had and the time they had available. Relationships between church members would be fulfilling and no-one would be left out, people would invite those they barely knew for coffee. And most importantly God would be praised and served with a joyful and sincere heart.

That's my dream this Valentine's Day. What's yours?

Hymn      *All the room was hushed and still*

All the room was hushed and still  
And when the bowl was filled  
He stooped to wash their feet  
And when it was complete, he said  
This is what I'm asking you to do  
This is why I'm kneeling here beside you  
This is what I want my church to be  
This is what I want the world to see  
Who it is you follow

*Love each other, One another*

*Love each other, In the way that I have loved you*

*Walk together, And whatever comes  
Love each other, In the way that I have loved you*

Let the room be hushed and still  
Let us go to where he kneels  
And join him as he serves  
And learn his ways of love

Creed      *(We stand to declare our faith)*

**All            We believe in God the Father,  
                  from whom every family  
                  in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,  
                  who lives in our hearts through faith,  
                  and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
                  who strengthens us  
                  with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;  
                  Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
                  Amen.**

Prayers    ~ Mark Grubb, *All Souls'*

O God, you are the bottomless well of peace,  
the heavenly sea of love,  
the fountain of blessings,  
and the giver of affection,  
and you send peace to those who receive it.

Open to us this day the sea of your love,  
and water us with the flowing streams of your grace.  
Make us children of quietness, and heirs of peace.  
Enkindle the fire of your love in us;  
plant holy reverence for you in us;  
strengthen our weakness by your power;  
bind us closely to you and to each other  
in one firm bond of unity;  
for the sake of Jesus Christ.

**Amen**



Thank you, Father, for the gift of love. The love of friends, of partners through life, of children, of parents and of brothers and sisters.

We pray for those who know too little love in their lives, either through loneliness or neglect, that they may find companionship and protection in others and come to know the depth of your love for them made real by Jesus.

We pray for those who know the pain of love torn by bereavement or absence, that they may know comfort and consolation, especially the families and friends of Reg Clarke, Peter and Pat Mason, Barbara Thirst and Bill Smith.

Thank you, Father for the gift of love shown by nurses, doctors, carers, neighbours and so many others as we endure the trials of the pandemic. We pray for those in need of love and care in our parish, especially Eileen and Peter Bliss, Patrick Chapman, Enid Hardman, John Hunter, Lynda Kirk, Catherine McCormack, Olive Park, Malcolm Pritchard and Joy Storkey.

Loving Father, as St Paul taught the Corinthians about love, so may each one of us know love in our lives every day.

**Amen**

God of goodness and love, in whom we trust in every hour of need, have mercy on all who are in distress across our troubled world:

The victims of oppression in Myanmar, Hong Kong and Russia,

The continuing conflicts in Yemen, Sudan, Somalia and Afghanistan,

The millions suffering across the world because of Covid.

Loving Lord, bring comfort and healing to the sick and injured, give peace to the dying, consolation to those living with loss, and to those working to bring aid and relief, give fortitude, courage and strength.

For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

HEAVENLY Father, you have filled the world with beauty but our greed has defaced it. We have been blessed to inhabit a planet that can provide for our every possible need but we have damaged its working to the point of failure.

Open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works and grant us understanding of the fragility of your creation.

Help us all to be mindful of the consequences of our environmental negligence and teach us to be more responsible in our stewardship of fragile environments and finite resources that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may preserve this incredible world for generations to come.

**Amen**

Love never fails

Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope.

Love compels us to care for all who are suffering as a result of the pandemic,

In our community, across the country and throughout the world.

Love compels us to be generous rather than look out for ourselves.

Love compels us to stand together in prayer with our neighbours near and far.

As we pray in our individual homes, around the nation and around the world, we are united as one family.

Help us all to learn that there is no them and us.

Just us.

Loving Father, thank you for the efforts of scientists and healthcare workers who are saving lives and protecting millions from the worst effects of this virus. Give our leaders the wisdom and courage to see that all nations and communities are supported during this terrible global crisis.

**Amen**

Lord Jesus, in your life and death you established your church on earth. This church. Our church. You gave authority to your priests and bishops to teach in your name and to bless in your name. We pray for all our clergy, lay and ordained, that they may with authority and power that all who hear may know of your transforming love and salvation in their lives.

In your name,

**Amen**

Now please join me as we close our time of prayer with the words of the Lord's Prayer:

### The Lord's prayer

Leader As our Saviour has taught us so we pray.

**All Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory, for ever and ever.  
Amen.**

### Notices – see N&N

#### Hymn Love Divine

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,

all thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus, thou  
art all compassion, pure, unbounded love  
thou art.

Visit us with thy salvation;  
enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit into  
every troubled breast. Let us all in thee  
inherit,

let us find the promised rest.

Take away the love of sinning; Alpha and  
Omega be.

End of faith, as its beginning,  
set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty, to deliver,  
let us all thy grace receive.

Suddenly return, and never,

nevermore they temples leave. Thee we  
would be always blessing, serve thee as  
thy hosts above, pray, and praise thee  
without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation; true and  
spotless let us be.

Let us see thy great salvation perfectly  
restored in thee. Changed from glory into  
glory,

till in heaven we take our place, till we  
cast our crowns before thee, lost in  
wonder, love and praise.

### Blessing

Leader The love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself,  
the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service,  
the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts;  
and the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.

All Amen.

### The Grace

All **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
And the love of God,  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
Be with us all evermore. Amen.**

Worshipping ▶ Loving ▶ Sharing ▶ Growing

