

LOVE

1 Corinthians 13
Simon Carey Holt

Of all the virtues we've explored,
love is surely the most comprehensive,
the most all-encompassing,
and the most slippery of them all.

What is love?

The word is used so loosely,
widely, indiscriminately,
it's hard to pin it down.
So generic is love
its substance evaporates.

I love my wife,
I love my iPhone;
I love God,
I love coffee.

Love is all you need, apparently.
Love rules,
love triumphs over all.

Love obligates,
love liberates;
love is fickle,
love is strong;
love is free,
love costs;
*'greater love hath no man that this,
that he lays down his life for a friend.'*

We fall in love,
we make love,
we search for it on-line.

We give it generously,
sacrificially,
resentfully,
inadequately,
tentatively.

We long for it,
we dream of it;
we crave it,
we weep for it.

Love compels us,
love eludes,
confounds and distracts us.
Love fulfils us and makes us sad.

Love enrages,
infuriates,
intoxicates
and blinds us.

Love lets us down,
love fails,
love ends.
And when love is lost
it leaves an ache so deep it scars.

So love is many things.

But today we celebrate the love of God.

It is a different love, a holy love.
It is also a love of complexity,
but one of such depth
and breadth
and height
and length
it renders all other loves
insignificant.

At this table we hold love in our hands:
the bread and the wine,
the body and the blood of Christ.
It is a love of such pain
and cost and sacrifice,
it leaves us speechless.

It is a love that reaches into the depths
of human experience
in all its beauty and ugliness,
its glory and depravity.

It's a love that knows no bounds,
no limits,
no exclusions.
There's no fine print.

It is a love that confronts,
names honestly,
forgives completely,
heals and restores.

It is perfect love.

It is this love that
1 Corinthians 13 describes,
the perfect love of God.
It is this love
we are now called to emulate.
Quite frankly, it's beyond us.

It's a high calling,
a big ask, this love.
It's always patient,
always kind,
never boastful,
envious or rude.
It's eternally selfless,
without a hint of malice,
irritation or resentment.
It rejoices in truth and transparency no
matter what the cost.
It bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.
It never ends.

All in all, impossible really;
yet possible in the smallest of ways.

We are not called to perfection,
but we are called to follow,
to try,
to keep believing when we fail,
to rise again when we fall.

Through simple words of affirmation:
'You are precious!'
Through warm embraces
and tender brushes of the cheek;
through daily actions of welcome,
surrender and service;
by giving preference
to the meek, the poor and the sick;
by sitting with the marginalized
and the grieving;
by speaking against wrong-doing
and unfairness.

By cooking when we don't feel like it
persisting when we would rather
resign,
forgiving when we would rather keep
the grudge warm,
serving others when we would much
prefer to sit alone.

In all of these ways
and a thousand others,
we give hands and feet to love.

Trifling efforts they may be,
fraught with mixed motives
and uneven results.
But in our feeble efforts
at love in daily life,
we touch a love so much deeper,
so much higher,
so much more all-encompassing than
anything we can conjure up ourselves.

*'For now we see in a mirror, dimly,
but then we will see face to face.'*

*'And now faith, hope and love abide,
these three;
and the greatest of these is love.'*


