

Rector's Letter – November 2019

Dear Friends,

My final Sunday is 24th November and my final service is at 10 am. Then in that following week I move to Birmingham. This is, therefore, my final magazine letter.

Having to write my last words reminds me of some of the funny things famous people have said on their death beds. The most amusing is probably Oscar Wilde's, 'This wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. Either it goes or I do.' Spike Milligan, the comedian, put on his gravestone, 'I told you I was ill.' I want to round off by talking about the final phrase of each of my preceding letters over 11 years 'with love.'



In our culture, the various uses of 'love' and its overuse have devalued its currency and made its definition rather loose. If we turn to the Bible, the thirteenth chapter of the Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth is a hymn to love and the middle section gives us a description of love.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or restless; it does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

The supreme symbol of love is the Cross of Christ. Here in the crucified, stretched-out body, we see that Jesus Christ holds nothing back but gives everything, even life itself, for us. This death shows us the height, breadth and depth of God's love. When we gaze at the Cross, we hear God's response to the question, 'How much does God love me?' His answer is 'This much.' Isaac Watts put it beautifully in one of my favourite hymns, *Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.*

However, I remember the story of how Truth went down to the market place to instruct people but despite his best efforts nobody paid much attention. He came home and put on his best robe called Story and went back. This time, everyone wanted to listen and when he went to leave, plead for more. Truth is best heard and understood in a story. Therefore, I want to end with the story of love, known as the parable of the prodigal son or the parable of the waiting father. This is love defined in a narrative. Rather looking at the whole story, I want to narrow our focus on a short phrase that has always spoken powerfully to me of God's love. You will remember how the younger son goes away to a distant land. After many days of revelry, he runs out of money. Then a famine strikes the land. Poor and hungry, he ends up working on a pig farm and is about to eat the swill, when he decides to head home to plead with his father to give him a job as a servant in the family home. He begins the journey back. Then we come to the phrase that tells us that his father has been longing for his return. We can imagine him scanning the horizon every day, aching to see his son. The Father is waiting. These words packed with emotion tell us that the bonds of love are not strained by geographical distance. 'When he was still far off...'

With love,

David

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