

Over the past few weeks we have been looking into the book by Matthew Ollerton The Bible the Story that makes sense of Life, and today's section is entitled:-

Messiah and Love or **Our Human need for love.**

The English language can be very confusing.... for example, we have 3 spellings of the word to, two spellings of the word there and a further confusion thrown into the mix when we abbreviate the words, they are.... to they're.

But it seems to be sadly lacking when it comes to word Love.

We only have one word to cover so many feelings. I love my husband, my children and my grandchildren, but I also love the colour green, it's my favourite colour. I love the seaside, I love my garden, I love the snow and I love photographyI could go on, but you know what I mean.

New Testament Greek has several words to describe love.

Eros refers to romantic love....there is the famous statue in Piccadilly circus of Eros with his bow and arrow of love.

Philia is love without romantic attraction and occurs between friends or family members.

Philia is found today in many of our words, such as Philanthropy, (love of mankind) Philosophy (love of wisdom), Philology, (love of words) and Philately (love of stamps).....the list goes on.

Stergo primarily refers to love between parents and children.

If we go back to the family in the box (and yes, we were all jammed into this cube for our photo) we can see all these types of love in action. We see Eros love in three couples, then Philia love across the

whole family and the Stergo love between children, parents and grandparents.

But when the early Christians wanted to speak of God's love, they used a different word altogether. The word is Agape.

Agape is the love originating from God or Christ for humankind.

My husband, who is studying New Testament Greek, tells me that the word love in our second 2nd reading, John 3 v 16 is from the verb of the word agape.

John 3 v 16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

It is one of the greatest and best loved of all bible verses. I remember learning it as a child in Sunday School. It was one on the 'gathering sentences' I used at a dear friend's funeral recently.....reflecting her faith and belief in eternal life.

The first thing that John 3 v 16 teaches us is God's love.... it says, "For God so loved". The reason why "God so loved" is because God himself is love.

The second thing that it teaches us is the object of God's love; it says, 'For God so loved the world.' This means that God loves you and me. It doesn't matter who we are, God loves us.

You can be black or white, rich or poor, young or old. It doesn't matter, God loves you. It doesn't matter if you been to prison or not, it doesn't matter if you are good or bad, or what you have done in your past life, God loves you.

He loves you with an everlasting love.

The third thing that John 3:16 teaches us is the sacrifice of God's love, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son."

What is the sacrifice of God's love? It is Jesus Christ dying for the sins of the world.

The final thing that we learn is the recipient of the gift of God's love; it says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but shall have ever lasting life."

What is the gift of God's love? It is the gift of eternal life and the recipient of that precious gift, is whoever believes in Him.

The life of Jesus recorded in the four gospels is love in action, love incarnate, the broken are healed, the guilty forgiven, outcasts embraced and the marginalised welcomed home.

As a new baby I was adopted by a couple in their 40s and they cared for me and looked after me and gave me a lovely home, but they weren't demonstrative. They never said *I love you* and when I look back on some of my actions growing up, I realise what I was doing was looking for the love of a mother that Stergo love.

This is what this section in the book is all about the Need for Human Love.

When a new baby comes along naming said child can sometimes cause problems. Our first child is called Naomi. Not until a few years ago when she was moaning about something did we realise that Naomi spelled backwards is I moan!

Fortunately, Joseph and Mary, when Jesus was born, had the pressure taken off them when the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said you are to give him the name Jesus.

We don't hear much about Jesus after his birth until he went to the temple as a 12-year-old. Luke 2 ⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.

Years later when Jesus was about 30, John baptised him in the river Jordan and a voice from heaven announces, "This is my Son whom I love (Agape.... the love of God) with him I am well pleased". This affirmation of love comes before the ministry of Jesus really starts.

After this wonderful occasion Jesus is then led into the desert for 40 days and forty nights where he is tested severely. Life can be like that for us too. Times of delight can be followed by times of testing.

After his time in the desert was over Jesus set about forming a team. A major part of the Messiah's task was to mobilise a new team that could start a revolution of agape love. To achieve this Jesus formed a small group of close followers to embody his kingdom values. By Lake Galilee he assembles a motley crew of fishermen, tax collectors and extremists like Simon the Zealot. At first, he chose 12 disciples who later became known as Apostles.

All 12 of his disciples, (with the possible exception of Judas,) were from the Galilee area.

After months on the road, the disciples were still struggling to understand what Jesus was doing, often putting their foot in it.

One of Jesus followers, Simon Peter, who had the subtlety of a bulldozer, spoke on behalf of the others when asked by Jesus; Who do you say that I am? Peter replies "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God". Quite a bold thing to do when you are facing another human being who grew up down the road from you.

Far from rejecting it Jesus endorses it.
This is the first time the word is used, and Jesus accepts it.
Messiah means anointed King.

This is where Love and Messiah meet. The Love of God given to us in the birth of Jesus and the acknowledgment by Jesus that he gives to Peter that he is indeed the Messiah.

Jesus spent most of his ministry time within a small triangle at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. The triangle is formed by three cities: Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. Yet today nearly a third of the world's population 2.4 billion, believe in Jesus of Nazareth.