

**5 WEEK SERMON SERIES – SERMON 4**





**RENEW Mission Life: Where Love Comes to Life**

## Sermon Four: …COMES TO LIFE

**Reading**s**:** 1 John 4:11-21; Colossians 3.1-11

**Introduction**

By its very nature, love is communal.

Solitary love—love of self above all else—has another name: Narcissism.

But even in a world as narcissistic as ours, we recognise that love counts. It’s more valuable than anything else. We look for love. We long for that sense of belonging that makes us matter. We ache for true, faithful, irreversible affection.

Cue the world of Hollywood, reality TV shows and the true hunger games!

Yet it’s not even that we need someone to love us. That could still be very self-centred. “All I need is for someone to love me!” is as selfish and infantile a cry as you could imagine.

No, we’re made in the image of the God who is love; we need to love as much as to be loved, to give as much as to receive.

Love is inherently communal.

The English poet and playwright Robert Browning put it beautifully; “Not where I breathe, but where I love, I live.”

Linger on that. Let it do its work on you. “Not where I breathe, but where I love, I live”.

Bear with me as I speak some theology:

When we say “God is Love” we say something about the way he is; it is the quality of his essential nature. Yet when we ask “What does that look like?” the answer comes in two ways: it is how he is in himself, and how he shows reveals that to us.

The great jewel at the centre of Christian theology is this: God is Three Persons in One Substance.

In other words, God is a community of eternal relationships.

1. **God’s Communal Love**

The Father loves the Son, the Spirit loves the Father; the Father gives honour to the Son, the Son glorifies the Father; the Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son…and so on. You get the picture and can see that that’s the way it is.

In other words, the love of God is not an abstract idea.

I’m not talking about *our* love *for* God. That’s the sort of love which can drive a person to become a terrorist.

This is all about God’s own love. It’s the divine life: the life of eternal communion of love in which the Father, Son and Spirit eternally love one another. The Persons live in love; it’s shown in the way they honour one another, glorify one another, and serve one another. Theirs is an eternity of joy in giving and receiving, honouring and thanksgiving. This is how God is in himself.

But if that were all it were, God’s love would still be self-centred.

And a self-obsessed God is hell, not heaven.

Let’s put the question this way: how do we know what God is like?

The answer? He reveals himself. In the creation, in the Bible, and pre-eminently in Jesus…the Word become flesh. This is how God reveals himself. Without this we wouldn’t have the faintest clue as to what he’s like.

But God’s eternal three-Person community is not a closed, narcissistic, self-centred club.

God opens himself to the world he’s created.

1. **Gods Open Circle**

He creates (he enters into relationships outside of himself), he sustains (he commits himself to that set of relationships eternally), he redeems (he opens himself to the pain of rejection, entering into death itself to redeem the creation he’s brought into being).

And he glorifies. Not just redeems and leaves us in the cold, albeit forgiven. He glorifies. He brings us into the divine family. He makes us his family. He unites us with Jesus. He gives his, eternal, life. He bestows his Spirit on us, and *in* us, to call him “Abba, Father”. He spreads the riches of table before us.

Think of the parable of the prodigal son and the father’s lavish party. Think of the picture of wedding banquet where God and man at table are sat down. Think of the rejoicing in heaven as we are made to be one with Jesus, conformed to his very image and likeness.

What does all this mean for us?

Simply this: to be immersed in the love of God is to be immersed into community.

It’s to be so filled with his fullness that his love is our life.

1. **God’s love comes to life in communities**

God’s love comes to life in communities. God’s love produces new expressions of human fellowship. It breaks down dividing walls, drowning old hostilities under the flood of his grace.

And what I’m talking about isn’t the ‘one day in heaven’ variety of relationship. What I’m describing is the very thing that marked the New Testament churches. They needed a new vocabulary to describe the love they experienced (*agape*) and a new way of expressing their self-emptied devotion to one another (*koinonia*).

That’s why the gospel was—and is—so radical. It made previously divided and often hostile groups into one. Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, male and female; “here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11).

When Paul speaks like this he’s not describing what might be one day, by and by. He’s giving voice to what the gospel actually did. It created a community that had never existed before. Christians had a new citizenship, a new family. And the whole of the New Testament is devoted to defending and preserving this miracle. That’s what Paul is so red-hot in his opposition to any form of so-called ‘gospel’ which would undermine it. Just read Galatians, for example!

Because that community had within it the life of the Triune God, it was open to the outsider. No closed club, but a flowing embrace of grace.

Did that mean it was problem free? Not a bit of it! Because it had within it the life of the Triune God it was assailed on every side. The world, the Flesh and the Devil himself opposed it then; and still do.

Because it has within it the life of the Triune God, the forces of darkness and sin always try to smuggle some form of idolatry into the camp. That always leads to inward looking, self-centred, narcissistic action.

But does any of that stop the life of the Triune God in his people?

No. He continually works to judge and to cleanse, heal and restore. His Spirit blows on the embers of the gospel and creates a flame of fire. His Son is the good Shepherd still. The Father makes sure that the barriers are still broken down so that we won’t fall captive to our own selfishness.

So…Love come to life! Where does love come? It comes from God, in Jesus to the world. What happens when that love comes? It transforms you! The love of God can’t leave you where you were, or where you are! And what happens when that love comes? It comes to life in a new community. It opens you up to a life you’ve never imagined…and to spiritual battle you could scarcely credit.

It is often said that the Dead Sea is dead because everything flows into it, but nothing flows out of it. God’s promise to the church is that we would be filled with *living* water. Flowing in without measure. Flowing out to the world.

That’s what love coming to life looks like!

*Play video – MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES 3*