

**5 WEEK SERMON SERIES – SERMON 3**





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

## Sermon Three: LOVE COMES TO…

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-6

**Introduction**

When the Beatles sang “all you need is love”, they sang more than they knew, and certainly more than they could deliver.

But they’re not alone.

How many plays, books, films, songs, paintings and poems have been produced on the theme of love?

And what do they have in common?

One thing: they expect love to transform you, even to transform the world.

When love comes, your world changes.

That’s the message. And it’s certainly the hope—the expectation if not the reality.

And, conversely, isn’t our relational pain due to the dashed expectations of disappointing love? Where love dies, hope and faith also shrivel up.

The pain is there because we trust that love will *do* something. We believe it will overcome obstacles and solve problems. But it seems to fail so often. Marriages entered into with great expectations turn to ashes. Parents abandon their children. Children abandon their parents. Love is a battlefield.

Yet in it all there’s an echo of our home. The glory of heaven hangs about us, even if we don’t recognise it. Love, which is the currency of the kingdom of heaven, is still worth something in the kingdoms of this world. Even if we don’t know what we’re saying, or what love it is we need, we still believe “love is all you need”. And so we sing along, hoping against hope it’s all true.

The problem is we don’t really know what love is. Even the best of human love isn’t the love of God which always transforms us.

1. **God’s Love Transforms You**

Here’s a true story.

Jillian grew up in a home of broken expectations. Her father abandoned her mother and the family in favour of a young assistant at work. The consequent emotional, financial and relational instability had terrible consequences. Her mother wobbled from relationship to relationship; with Jillian’s eventual step-father showing his ‘love’ for her in all the wrong ways. From the age of 10 he abused her regularly.

As soon as she could, she ran away from home and tried to leave the pain behind. But the pain followed her, even through the haze of alcohol and drugs she used to take it away.

Hungry for love she lurched from one relationship to the next, hoping that ‘this time’ love would set her free. But it didn’t. She spiralled ever downward, eventually falling into the sex industry. She was little more than a tradable commodity. This wasn’t a feminist statement of her liberation; she was a captive—virtually a slave—to the pimp master who was also her drug dealer.

She was desperate to get away, but every avenue seemed blocked. One day she made a run for it, literally. She escaped through a window and ended up looking for refuge in the nearest safe place she could find.

She didn’t know it at the time, but the place in which she found shelter was linked to a wider network of Christian ministries. They were able to give her a safe environment to get proper medical and other care. After about a year she found herself sharing a sort of halfway house with three other women from similar backgrounds.

Geographically and in every other way it was a world away from the pimp and his connections.

The group of women shared similar issues. Shame, poor self-image, guilt, fear, distrust of men, anger, withdrawal issues. These were their world.

But love breaks through in the most unexpected ways. This is not the place to relate the whole series of events, but Jillian found herself transformed by the love of God.

One day, in a church service in a small country town, the preacher spoke of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. The floodgates broke open. Years of pain, heartache, and rejection tumbled out. *She* was the woman. Jesus was speaking to *her*. She felt like she was the only one in the building. To her alone, it seemed, the words “your sins are forgiven” made their mark. She was washed, cleansed, renewed, clothed and healed.

To this day she looks back to that night as the most significant turning point in her life. It’s as though she hadn’t even been alive before.

Which in a way, is true.

The love of God isn’t for healthy but for the sick. Jesus didn’t come for the righteous, but for the lost.

And if we think we’re not sick or lost, you’re more sick and lost than you know.

Why share stories like these?

And why does the Bible itself make so much of people like Moses, David and Paul (all murderers)?

Why does Paul write to the Ephesians “you *were* darkness, *but now* you are light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8)

And why does he say to the Corinthians, some of you *were* fornicators, thieves, adulterers, idolaters, drunkards, homosexuals, swindlers, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1Cor 6:9-11).

Why? Because all of us in the same boat. In Jesus, God plunges into the deepest darkness to find us. He saves but raising us from spiritual death:

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.” (Eph 2:1-6)

The BUT GOD makes all the difference.

The “but God” is where love comes to life.

It’s where love comes to us, transforming us to be part of a new humanity in Jesus.

1. **God’s Love Transforms Us**

This is the time in our history—the history of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand —where these stories again need to be our lifeblood, where texts like these ring out clearly.

The LCA has a unique history, and we Lutherans share a wonderful theological inheritance.

But circumstances have meant that those riches have often stayed locked away.

Lutherans in Australia and New Zealand have always been in the minority. Not only were our forefathers small fish in a big pond dominated by the Roman Catholics and Anglicans (in the early days of settlement) but they were often German or Danish speaking and rural people to boot.

Two world wars against Germany didn’t help their assimilation.

So, we circled the wagons.

For 150 years Lutheran parish ministry essentially focussed on pastoring a number of interconnected families. The pastor was always there: baptising their infants, confirming their young people, presiding over their marriages and officiating at their funerals.

Being primarily rural, the interconnections were strong. Lutheran identity was distinct. And the world out there seemed full of threats, heresies and weird beliefs.

We were good at looking after our own. We provided cradle to grave care. Our own knew us and we knew them. We could almost accept someone who married into us, but we had no real expectation of conversion growth or a widespread spiritual awakening. And even a Lutheran by marriage was a bit of a rarity in the early days.

But that world has gone. Nor is it the world the gospel will let us inhabit.

The gospel opens up a different world. A world in which we can expect to baptise more believing adults than children of believing parents. It’s a world where the name “Lutheran” will be completely foreign to many who meet us. It’s a place where Jesus Christ will only be known as a swear word, until the love of God reveals it to be the most beautiful and powerful of all the names under heaven.

It’s a world were love comes to life in a new generation, who know nothing of the Bible, church or anything to do with our unique history.

In short, it’s a New Testament world.

But if the gospel thrived then, why shouldn’t we expect it to thrive now?

And if it transformed the world then, why shouldn’t it do so now?

*Play video – MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES 2*