

**5 WEEK SERMON SERIES – SERMON 2**





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

## Sermon Two: WHERE LOVE COMES

**Reading: 1 John 4:7-10**

**Introduction**

The English language is remarkable.

English has unrivalled power and flexibility, and a huge vocabulary; the complete Oxford English Dictionary runs to over 25 volumes.

So you’d think we’d have more than one word for ‘love’. After all we’ve got more than one word for most things!

But nope, the one word—‘love’—has to do for many things. I ‘love’: my footy team, my wife, my car and coffee.

A bit limiting isn’t it? Especially when we’ve been told since the sixties “all you need is love”.

What love? Where from? And what for?

1. **What is Love?**

Our New Testament wasn’t written in English.

The Greek their writers used had at least four words for ‘love’.

People could speak about their love for a brother or sister, the romantic or even erotic love for their wife or husband, or love and respect for their parents and use a different word each time.

But none of these could do the job. They needed something else to describe their experience of the love of God.

The New Testament writers took a word from the very fringes of the Greek dictionary and filled it with a whole new meaning. That word—*agape*—became their very own. They used it to describe their experience of God’s love and their participation in that love for one another.

When God poured his love into the hearts of his children they needed a way of describing it. So they picked up on the under-used word *agape* and reshaped it.

*Agape* is unique. It has no human parallel and comes from no human source.

1. **Where** does *agape* come from?

*Agape* is from God. That’s what John tells us: “*agape* (love) is from God” (1 John 4:7). God is “*agape*” (1 John 4:8).

Why all the fuss? What does it matter what word is used?

The New Testament writers all preached from their experience. They weren’t writing letters into the air. They wrote to real people in real places about real issues. What they and their readers shared in common was their experience of *agape*. That is, their experience of God, who is *agape*, coming to them. Transforming them. Changing their lives and relationships.

Many of us have been in and around churches for a long time. We’ve become used to a church culture, a churchy way of doing things. To things being ‘nice’. But that’s light years away from the New Testament.

The New Testament churches had no buildings and no resources to speak of. They had nothing by way of earthly power. Many of their members were poor. Lots of them were slaves. Often they were persecuted. Suffering was a daily occurrence. Their members were frequently dis-inherited for their faith. They were misunderstood, misrepresented and often ridiculed.

But one thing they had was love. *Agape*. Love that crossed cultural boundaries, broke down dividing walls, and which transformed cultures and communities. Love which flowed into them and out through them. Love which enabled them to stand in the midst of huge upheavals. Love that was the expression of faith and hope, and greater than both of them.

Christians living in other situations often know this better than we do.

A Muslim man becomes a Christian and loses his family, his inheritance, and possibly his life. The daughter of a spiritualist medium is cut off by her family and experiences dreadful demonic opposition in her daily life. A prominent Hindu, named after one of the most powerful of the gods, becomes a Christian; he’s ostracised by his family, rejected by his village is ridiculed in public. His barn is burnt down. The son of a village witch doctor believes the gospel. The village cattle get sick and the villagers take revenge for the curse they think he’s brought on them by burning his house down.

These are all real. There are thousands of other stories like them being acted out across the world as we speak. Not ‘nice’. Not ‘churchy’. But real. But I’m not saying this to make you feel guilty for having things easy.

It’s all so you’ll understand the world of the New Testament Christians. Their stories were just like these. They weren’t meeting in comfort. They often lived “in the valley of the shadow of death”. But they feared no evil.

So, why did they continue? What had happened to make them cling to God and to one another? What made their new Christian sisters and brothers more precious than their flesh and blood families?

*Agape* had come to them. Not as an idea, but as a living reality. The love of God had a face and a name. Jesus had met them.

1. **How** **does love come to us?**

**How** does that love come to us? In Jesus, who is God become flesh?

When you see his face, hear his voice, receive his body and blood, you are experiencing *agape*. That’s why I said it doesn’t come from us.

For a few (like Peter and John) Jesus had met them face to face. For others he had met them through his Spirit in the preaching of the gospel. The love of God turned them upside down and inside out, filling them with a new hope and a new power.

This is how John puts it: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be a sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

*Agape* isn’t a good feeling, or a warm fuzzy emotion. Its “red hands, clotted with blood, thrusting us up to God”![[1]](#footnote-1)

Love like this isn’t like love for my footy team, my car, my coffee or even my wife. That’s why none of the existing Greek words could do the job! In Jesus, God does something we can’t. He enables us to love him.

Do you hear what John said? “In this is love…*not* that we loved God!”

That’s a **huge** understatement!

We loved everything **but** God! We loved our idols, ourselves, our lusts and our pleasures more than we loved God.

In fact, we hated God. We were at war with him. He was our mortal enemy.

So God’s love is something that human love isn’t. And it does something that human love can’t do.

We rightly admire a brave soldier who lays down his life for his mates. But we’d think him utterly loopy if he abandoned his own position to lay down his life for his enemies.

But that’s what God has done. He’s abandoned his own position.

God didn’t stay safely behind the parapets of heaven as we waged war against him. He crossed no-man’s-land, broke down our barbed wire defences and rescued us from his own wrath. Rather than seeing us destroyed, he’d destroy himself.

Today we wear crosses as items of jewellery. In churches they’re objects of devotion.

In Jesus’ day a cross was a sign of utter abandonment and desolation. In going to the cross, Jesus went beyond no-man’s-land into hell itself. He went into the heart of darkness. He plunged into the unknown abyss of human and demonic evil.

Why? Because that’s where we were. That’s where he had to go to find us. That’s what *agape* does. That’s where love comes.

*Play video – MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES 1*

1. From the words of a song by the late Rev. Dr. G. C. Bingham. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)