



SERMON SERIES



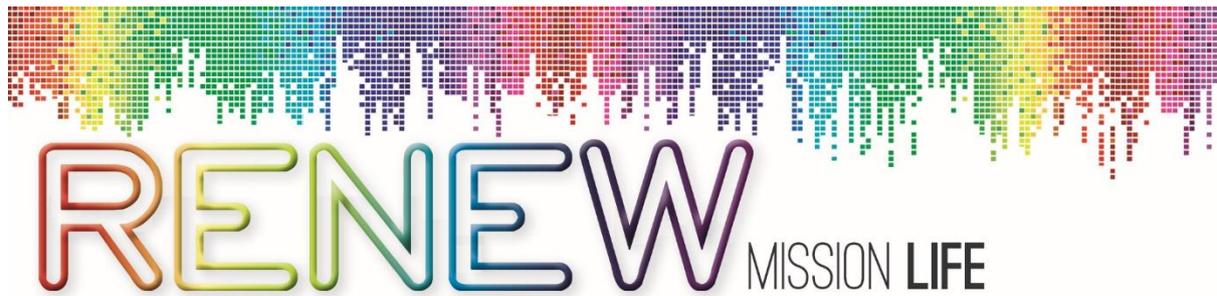
The Lutheran Church of Australia Copyright 2015

The Lutheran Church of Australia gives permission for these sermons, bible studies, PowerPoints and other material (e.g. promotional videos and flyers) to be used free and adapted by anyone on the condition that the materials are attributed to their source and not sold or contracted to any third party without the permission of the Lutheran Church of Australia Board for Local Mission, 197 Archer Street, North Adelaide, South Australia, 5006. Dean.Eaton@lca.org.au.

Origins

In June 2014 Bishop John Henderson produced a briefing paper for a proposed working group to attend to the LCA's tagline, *Where Love Comes to Life*. The working group was convened in August 2014, under Rev Dr Noel Due, appointed by the bishop. Other members were Mrs Ruth Zimmermann, Dr Pauline Simonsen, Mrs Anne Dohnt, Rev Reid Matthias and Rev Joel Cramer. Rev Dr Greg Lockwood was not able to join the group, but offered his services to consult as needed. This paper is the first of the tasks the bishop set the group: to 'investigate the theological origins of the theme, and prepare a background paper on its meaning and how it might inform the church ... [by providing] a clear, scriptural, gospel centred explanation, retaining [its] emphasis on sanctification'. The paper was drafted by Dr Due and sent out to the working group for review and revision before being adopted as the foundational document for the rest of the group's work.

In 2015 the Lutheran Church of Australia Board for Local Mission decided to maximise the bible studies produced by this group to form the basis for a sermon and bible study series called RENEW Mission Life – *Where Love Comes To Life*. After adding some material by Graham Harms, further writing and editing by the Rev Dr Noel Due and Dean Eaton, this edited version of the original work was submitted to the Mission Directors of the LCA for approval (Rev Dr Steen Olsen, Rev John O'Keefe, Rev Brett Kennett).



A five week season of renewing local mission in a congregation, school or other community setting

Overview of series

Sermon & Bible Study Series Title: Where Love Comes To Life

Big idea for the series: Mission life flows out of who God is and who we are becoming.

Explanation of big idea: A missional life participates in the shared life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As a consequence we are transformed to be a community where Gods love comes to life. The same love that transforms us is drawing our families, neighbours and friends into new life in Christ. "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." (2 Corinthians 5.14 NRSV)

Purpose of series: To help people grow in their understanding and participation in the mission of God in the world.

Series Outline & Schedule:

Week One: WHERE LOVE COMES TO LIFE - Introduction to the series

WHERE LOVE COMES MID-WEEK BIBLE STUDY ONE

Week Two:

- WHERE LOVE COMES SUNDAY SERMON
- WHERE LOVE COMES MID-WEEK BIBLE STUDY TWO

Week Three:

- LOVE COMES TO... SUNDAY SERMON
- LOVE COMES TO... MID-WEEK BIBLE STUDY THREE

Week Four:

- COMES TO LIFE SUNDAY SERMON
- COMES TO LIFE MID-WEEK BIBLE STUDY FOUR

Week Five:

- LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES SUNDAY SERMON
- LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES MID-WEEK BIBLE STUDY FIVE

Making the most of the RENEW Mission Life Season 2016



The Season PACKAGE

1. RENEW Mission Life five week sermon and *Bible study series: **Where Love Comes To Life***
2. RENEW Missional Leadership – a series of ten devotions for your leaders that could be used as devotions at your normal scheduled meetings (e.g. Ministry Team)
3. RENEW Love. Life Communities eight week bible study designed to form Missional Communities in your congregation.
4. Promotional Tools – digital flyers, promotional videos, useful web links.
5. Theme Chorus to teach your congregation pre-season so that you know it already when the Mission Life season commences.

Launching RENEW Love. Life Communities



The final resource provided is the RENEW Love. Life Communities eight week bible study designed to form Missional Communities in your congregation. A Missional Community, or what we are calling Love. Life Communities, is different from a Mission Committee. A Mission Committee is designed to support missionaries (usually far away) through raising awareness, prayer and financial support. A local Congregational Missional Community on the other hand is a mission team working in the local community and social networks to sow the Gospel, reap the harvest and engage new converts in the initial stages of discipleship.



PLANNING

You can download the RENEW Mission Life package of resources and commence preparing. It is suggested that you designate five weeks post Pentecost for the RENEW Mission Life sermon series and Bible studies, however, so as to maximize the energy of a new year some Pastors are planning adapt the material to use for Lent.

Two weeks after the season is completed commence the next stage of your local mission development by starting your first **Love. Life Community**. This is a new team (community of practice) working in the evangelism space of your congregation. They will become pivotal to sowing and reaping the harvest God wants to send you. The RENEW Mission Life sermon series is an essential pre-requisite to commencing a **Love. Life Community** as it is designed to bring understanding of how to support those members of the congregation working in local mission.

Love. Life Communities are a new kind of small group in your congregation doing evangelism in social networks, the local community, Schools and other places.

LEADERSHIP

It is ideal to recruit at least a host and a leader for your first **Love. Life Mission Community** prior to commencing the RENEW Mission Life sermon series so that they can assist in promotions and preparation of the launch of the Love. Life Community. This may not be possible as it may take going through the RENEW Mission Life series to inspire some suitable people to sense the call into the missional space.

Induction for your Love. Life Community leaders will be provided by Dean Eaton utilizing YouTube to help leaders know how to prepare for, promote and recruit people to be a part of one or more Love. Life Communities in your congregation. Leaders will be encouraged to always work in a collaborative manner and in an accountability relationship with their Pastor.

Please commence praying and thinking about the right leader for such a team. Possibly the right person won't be gifted as an evangelist but they will be a gifted leader with a passion and calling to local mission. You will need to release them and all of the people joining a Love. Life Community, from responsibilities in the 'church space' otherwise they won't have the energy margin in their lives for engaging with people who are not yet Christians. If a vital leader or worker in your Congregation has to resign from duties in the 'church space' to join a Love. Life Community don't be alarmed. Trust God to provide the workers you need to keep congregational life healthy. It may also mean that you decide to stop doing some things that are not bearing fruit in order to launch Love. Life Communities.

PROMOTION

The series of promotional videos for the Mission Life season. There are four videos;

1. **LOVE. LIFE** – Play this video at least a couple of times during announcement time in your Sunday Worship to flag the coming Renew Mission Life season. Suggested follow up remarks after playing:
“Do you love life? Do you know the God who brings life and love to all people everywhere? Find out more this year when we launch a five week sermon and Bible study season called – Renew Mission Life: Where Love Comes to Life. Commencing (date)...”
2. **LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES 1** – This is to be played at the end of sermons 1 & 2 as listed in the sermon notes.
3. **LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES 2** - This is to be played at the end of sermon 3 as listed in the sermon notes.
4. **LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES 3 (compilation of parts 1 & 2)**. This is to be played at the end of sermon 4 as listed in the sermon notes.
5. **LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES 3 (compilation of parts 1 & 2)**. This is to be played at the end of sermon 5 as listed in the sermon notes.

A flyer explaining what it’s all about is to be handed out and displayed in your digital spaces (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Email, Church Web site) as well as distributed in printed format for a few weeks in a row on Sundays.

PREPARATION

Someone needs to take responsibility for promotions, ensuring that all promotional material is distributed on time and that the videos can be played at the appropriate time during Sunday Worship as per the suggested schedule.

Pastors will need to prepare sermons utilizing (and adapting) the sermons and sermon PowerPoints provided. Please note if you change the sermon content substantially then you will also need to change the provided PowerPoints and weekly Bible Studies.

PRAYER

Without a call to prayer during this important season you may miss some of God’s surprises coming your way. It is suggested that the entire Congregation be requested to increase their prayer during this season with a specifically local focus. *“Lord who are you drawing into your Kingdom amongst our families, friends, neighbours, and how can we meaningfully participate in what you are doing?”* The Mission Life: Where Love Comes to Life Bible studies will include suggested prayers throughout the Mission Life season.

THEME CHORUSES & VIDEOS

These theme videos and choruses are presented as further resources rather than an essential part of the series.

Songs to sing:

Love Comes To life - Big Daddy Weave - LYRIC VIDEO, Length 3.45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bB-PfP6VEUk>

Where Love Comes to Life – Adrian Kitson - LYRIC VIDEO, Length 3.45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmJ7iwZhgZk>

Here is Love (Amazing Love) (Old Hymn) – arranged by Abby Scott and Chris Eaton Length 3.50

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI0D_Am_dxM

Theme videos to use pre-sermon:

What is Love? - Theme video (not a chorus) Length – 1.55

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQA9YtcN1UA>

Without Love - Theme video (not a chorus) Length 2.55

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0MHBRWiywk>

SERMONS

RENEW Mission Life: *Where Love Comes To Life*

Sermon One: WHERE LOVE COMES TO LIFE

Welcome to our first RENEW Mission Life season. This year the season theme is *Where Love Comes to Life*. After today's sermon we commence the five weekly Bible Studies.

Reading: 1 John 4:7-21

Introduction

When people fall in love, it's as if they come remarkably to life. Their eyes sparkle with special lights, their breath comes more urgently and they seem somehow to be straining forward to meet life. Love breathes life into the everyday ordinariness of our existence.

Actually, love changes people. The experience of being loved, at any stage of life, brings with it a kind of newness that brings out the best in us. We become more open to the gifts of life and the needs of others, and we live in a new way, a renewed way. Love brings life.

1. God is Love

Of course, we can hardly think about love or life without thinking of God. 1 John 4:16b tells us that, *God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them*.

In the very beginning God brought life to the world, reshaping the primeval chaos into a habitable planet (Genesis 1).

Then God breathed his own life into our human bodies and brought us to life (Genesis 2).

2. God is Life

God even entered human life at a depth which no-one could have anticipated, becoming a human being and filling our humanity with his own life.

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood

(John 1.14 Message)

This flesh-taking (incarnation) was not an interesting experiment but God's own project to rescue us from death and futility, and to renovate the whole world. In spite of our worst efforts, even when we killed him, God succeeded in bringing love back to life (John 1).

3. God is on Mission

To continue his work on earth, God created the church, whose task now is to celebrate love and life, and to be the vehicle for God's continued work of bringing love to life in the world. The church lives on the gifts of God – God's forgiveness, God's love, God's own life.

In its worship the church experiences the love of God in words and actions of forgiveness and of empowerment. Infused with the real presence of Jesus Christ, love comes decisively to life every time the people of God gather.

Life in the church is really a preparation and empowerment for a life of love in the world.

Play video – LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES 1

As we hear the good news of Jesus Christ, as we receive his body and blood, we become new people, with new potential for good, with new energy for a life of love wherever God gives us the opportunity.

Through us our families, our communities and our workplaces might well experience something of God's love as it comes to life again in us. That's the plan. The life of a Christian is a life of faith active in love (Galatians 5), empowered by the love of Christ himself (1 Corinthians 13). Indeed, we have no other obligation, except to participate in this world transforming gift of God's love (Romans 13).

The paradox of our time in history is that

we spend more, but have less;

we buy more, but enjoy it less.

We have bigger houses, and smaller families;

more conveniences, but less time;

more medicine, but less wellness.

We read too little, watch TV too much,

and pray too seldom.

We have multiplied our possessions,

but reduced our values.

These are the times of tall men, and short character;

These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce;

of fancier houses, but broken homes.

We've learned how to make a living, but not a life;

we've added years to life, not life to years;

we've worked at cleaning up the air, but polluted the soul.¹

Although many have solved the problem of how to make a living, we are left to wonder why we live.

The good news is ...Jesus Christ spoke about the way we can move beyond superficial living...into a relationship with God and His people.

¹ Adapted from Bob Moorehead - <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/22242-the-paradox-of-our-time-in-history-is-that-we>

Discovering this kind of life is the reason why we are doing the RENEW Mission Life season.

Together we will see that real life begins when we experience Jesus as the heart and centre of our world, our work, our witness and all of our relationships.

Conclusion

A missional life participates in the shared life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As a consequence we are transformed to be a community where God's love comes to life. The same love that transforms us is drawing our families, neighbours and friends into new life in Christ, thus we are urged by the Holy Spirit to include and invite all people to belong to God's family. "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." (2 Corinthians 5.14 NRSV)

So, how can we make the most of this season of being renewed in our mission life?

- Consider being here every week to join us in this sermon series.
- Starting this week consider utilizing the bible studies provided either in an existing small group or in one that you form for this season? If that is not possible for you then try doing the studies in your own time and finding someone to discuss your reflections with you, either online or in person once a week.
- Pray and ask God to shape your life through this season.

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.

2. 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.

3. **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. It's “red hands, clotted with blood, thrusting us up to God”!²

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 – LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES 1

² From the words of a song by the late Rev. Dr. G. C. Bingham.

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.

2. 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 where 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 – LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES 2

RENEW Mission Life: *Where Love Comes To Life*

Sermon Four: ...COMES TO LIFE

Readings: 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. There 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.

2. God's 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 us 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.

3. 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-emptying 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 – LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES 3

RENEW Mission Life: *Where Love Comes To Life*

Sermon Five: LOVE. LIFE COMMUNITIES

Readings: Matthew 5.14-16 (Message); Romans 10:12-14

Introduction

You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. (Matthew 5.14-16 Message)

Is Jesus calling you into the family business; *the renewal of all things*? To 'keep open house', so that people may open up to God; to be 'generous with your life' so that all people everywhere may discover this generous Father in heaven'?

Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? (Romans 10:12-14)

Therefore this message of reconciliation which we proclaim is for everyone and ultimately of the whole creation (Romans 8:19-23; Ephesians 1:5-10)

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, (Ephesians 3.16-18)

1. Responding to God's Call

You cannot be on mission with God unless you are first embedded (rooted, surrounded, implanted) in Jesus' life with God. This happens in our Baptism and works out in our everyday walk with God in various ways. For example,

In our worship:

As believers we have been raised up with Christ into a place of communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Romans 8.30; Eph. 2.6). This is the embedded (rooted, surrounded, implanted) place from which we worship, as we enter into Christ's perfect worship God comes to us in His Word and in the bread and wine (Hebrews. 8.1-6).

In our prayers:

It is from this place in Christ that we pray in His name as we see that we are caught up in Christ's perfect prayer life (John 17, Heb. 10.19).

In our relationships:

It is from this place that we see others as not only made in God's image but also justified by his bodily sacrifice (2 Corinthians. 5.16-17).

In our mission:

It is from this place that we live in the fullness of Christ's life in the Spirit (Romans 15.29) which compels us to love all people, to serve them and to share with them our greatest treasure – Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4.7). It is from this place that we listen to and echo the Master's call upon every person 'Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life' (Matthew 11:28-30 Message).

Embedded in Christ we engage with others and the creation. We respond to Jesus' invitation to 'walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace' (Matthew 11:28-30 Message).

This requires that we are not doing mission to pay for our sins, to earn God's approval or for self-importance, but rather because we are working with Jesus in the family business, '...making all things new' (Revelation 21:5).

2. Participating in Gods Mission

What does your participation in the love that renews all things look like?

Therefore the love of Christ compels us.... Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own (2 Corinthians 5.13-15).'

We all have different roles within the task of local mission.

Some of us are called to serve the GROW aspect of our mission; offering people who are Christians to grow in Christ through offering opportunities for Worship (Word & Sacrament) and service.

Others amongst us are called to serve in the GO aspect of our mission; offering people who are not yet Christians to come to Christ through offering opportunities to be invited into God's family.

Grow and **Go** are ongoing tasks that intertwine. There is no linear sequence that says first we *grow* until we reach maturity, after which we begin to *go* into the world. If we wait until we feel ready, most of us will never *go*. Rather it is **as we go that we grow**.

Series Conclusion

In this our first RENEW Mission Life season on the theme *Where Love Comes To Life*, we have learnt that it is in God that we find love. It is in God that we find our true identity and purpose for living. This is because love has always been alive in the Divine Community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore a missional life is a participation in the shared life of Father, Son and Spirit and a participation in Gods proclamation of this life to the whole of creation (Mark 16:15). This is *why we go* and *make disciples* of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28.19 NLT)
Will you pray today, *here am I Lord, send me?* Send me into the harvest?

If so then get ready to form a group to do the 8 weeks of bible study and team formation in a Love. Life Community.