

**Ripon and Lower Dales
Methodist Circuit
Worship at Home
9th May 2021**

**A Triangle, a Circle and a Celtic knot.
The Geometry of Christian Love**

Welcome

Welcome to worship.

Let's begin with some words from Psalm 92.

*"It is good to praise the Lord, and make music
to your name, O Most High,
To proclaim your love in the morning,
And your faithfulness at night,
To the music of the ten-stringed lyre
And the melody of the harp.
For you make me glad by your deeds, O Lord
I sing for joy at the work of your hands".*

Song StF 343

All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
Give my praise to the Fountain of delights;
For in my helplessness You heard my cry,
And waves of mercy poured down on my life.

I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
I will sing of the blood that never fails;
Of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
Of death defeated and life without end.

Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor,
Clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
You're the Way, the Truth, the Life.
Star of the Morning, glorious in holiness,
You're the Risen One, heaven's Champion
And You reign, You reign over all.

I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
Yearn to dwell where the glory never fades;
Where countless worshippers will share one
song,
And cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!

Beautiful Saviour

Stuart Townened c 1998 Thankyou Music

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
We thank you for this day, and that you have
met us at this place.
We thank you that whoever we are and
whatever our circumstances we can be
assured that you are open to us and welcome
us without prejudice or judgement.

Forgive us for our failings and those times that
we have let you down.

Forgive us for our wanderings and the times
we have failed to listen to your word or heed
your promptings.

Be with us as we gather around your word.
Speak into our hearts and minds and lead us
on we pray,
In Jesus' precious name. Amen

Intro

When we belong to a group there is usually
something that unites us. Something that binds
us together. If we support a football team it is
the "beautiful" game and our passion will be for
our particular team. If we belong to a choir, it is
the act of singing and the beauty of song that
is our unifying inspiration.

But what draws us together as Christians. Is it
God? Or Jesus? The church? Yes, all of these,
but above all it is LOVE.

Love, and in particular, Christian love, is what
holds together this disparate group of people in
a way that just a common interest could never
hope to do.

When I was younger, there was a song that
was often sung, "Bind us together Lord, bind
us together Lord, bind us together in love".
Well that song may have made me cringe at
the time, but there's more truth in those words
than we might at first realise, and we'll be
thinking about that today.

The bible speaks a lot about love, and there
are four words used for "love" in the original
Greek of the New Testament, all with different
meanings. One however is predominant,
Agape, the most commonly used word for love
in the New Testament. It was adopted by the
early church and developed in meaning as a
special and unique Christian love. It is a love
that extends not only to nearest and dearest,
friends and neighbours, but even to enemies
and extending to the whole world.
It is a principal by which we live.

Reading John Ch 15v9-17

*⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved
you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my
commandments, you will abide in my love, just
as I have kept my Father's commandments
and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have
spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and
that your joy may be full.*

¹² *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants,^[a] for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

¹⁷ *These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

So in order to hold the thoughts of this talk together, we'll think of it in terms of the Geometry of Christian Love. A Triangle, a Circle and a Celtic knot.

The Triangle of God's Love

The Triangle of God's Love, is a triangle between God the Father, Jesus and ourselves as his children.

Jesus tells his disciples, *"as the Father has loved me, so I have loved You"*

And in 1 Jn 5v1 *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is God's child, and whoever loves the Father also loves the Father's children.*

So here are three thoughts, one for each side of the triangle.

Christian love originates with the Father

1 John 4 v7 *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God"*.

It's not just that Love comes from God, but the Bible intimates that God himself is love. Love is part of his nature. It is the source of his compassion, his grace and his mercy. It is the origin of his "loving kindness".

We mustn't make the mistake in thinking that God's love is just an upscaled version of the love we might feel for someone. God's love is pure and completely without stain.

The love that emanates from God is for the world and all of his creation. *"For God so loved the world"... (or as some versions have it "God loved the world so much).. that he sent his only begotten son..."*

His *motivation* for sending Jesus is love, and his *reason* for sending Jesus is to show that love.

And so, God's love is a heavenly love, a pure love, and a transforming love.

But love is an abstract thing, a thing without substance, if it is not put into action. It needs flesh putting on it.

The second side of the triangle.

Christian love - is maintained by the Son

"Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine", so says the Christmas carol by Christina Rossetti.

Just as the WORD became flesh, so God's love became flesh.

Jesus' ministry was a ministry characterised by love. He reached out to those society had rejected. He reached out in "loving kindness" to those who others found revolting. We possibly don't consider enough just how horrified people were at some of the choices Jesus made, choices prompted by love.

And as Jesus' love is demonstrated to us by his words and his actions, His love for the Father is maintained as he "abides" in Him. Our Christian love is maintained in the Son when we "abide" in him.

To be "In Christ" is to be in a close personal relationship. Jesus describes it in the verses just before this where he pictures himself as a vine, and we remain attached to the vine. We "abide" in him, we are not separate.

In fact, if we become separated we die, just as a branch or limb dies when it is removed from the tree.

So to abide in Jesus is to have life, and to live in Jesus is to share in His love and the love of God.

The third side of the triangle.

Christian love - is fruitful by the Spirit

One of the most well known passages in scripture, often read at weddings is found in 1 Corinthians Ch13

⁴ *Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, and it is not proud. ⁵ Love is not rude, is not selfish, and does not get upset with others.*

Love does not count up wrongs that have been done. ⁶ *Love takes no pleasure in evil but rejoices over the truth.* ⁷ *Love patiently accepts all things. It always trusts, always hopes, and always endures.*
⁸ *Love never ends.*

The fruit of Christian love echoes the fruit of the Spirit. Patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness and so on.
 Christian love isn't simply a feeling – it is fruitful. It manifests itself in action and in our relationship with others.

There is potentially a rich harvest from the application of Christian love, but that fruit is not possible until we interact with others.

StF 242

A new commandment I give unto you
 That you love one another as I have loved you,
 That you love one another as I have loved you.

By this the world shall know
 that you are my disciples,
 If you have love for one another.
 By this the world shall know
 that you are my disciples,
 If you have love for one another.
Anon

This leads us to the CIRCLE

The Circle of Christian love

In his last days on earth, Jesus is keen to emphasise to his disciples the importance of loving one another. He teaches them about humility, serving others and not themselves. He washes their feet. He tells them that the old orders will be swept away. All his teaching and his actions point them to a new way of thinking and a new way of being. In fact he calls it a "new commandment".
 A commandment to love.

He instructs them to "*Love one another as I have loved you*".

Those words are significant, because he follows them by saying

¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*"

He is pointing to his own sacrifice, but also to a cost that they themselves might face.

He is telling them that this love he is speaking of is a sacrificial love, a self-giving love; a selfless love.

And so, the Circle breaks out of the triangle. With the triangle of God's love central to our Christian experience, we look outwards from one another and out into the world where this Christian love might see action.

During lockdown we have been able to show our Christian love to one another in unique and newly discovered ways, and to the wider world in ways that have sometimes surprised us.

As we edge back into our church buildings and our fellowships, and as we seek God's vision anew, we need to do so with Christian love to the forefront of our minds.

Each one of us will have had a different experience, some will have found the last year very difficult and will have experienced great sadness and anxiety. We need to approach our re-gathering with great sensitivity and celebrate the fact that we are one in him and share in his life giving and saving grace.

The bible tells us "*He who loves the Father loves those who have been born of him*", so it is inevitable that our starting point has to be with loving God. As we have already seen, God is the source of that love.

As the circle widens to include the non-believing world. Let's remember Jesus' instructions to love your neighbour as we learn to love ourselves. To love even those who may not like us. To love even those we might be uncomfortable with.

Christian love is a sacrificial love, a self-giving and generous love that looks outwards and not inwards. It is a love that puts others first and ourselves last. It is a love that is deliberate and consciously motivated.

Let us pray

Prayers

Bind us together in Love

That is our prayer.

May that love spread outwards like ripples on a pond.

And may that love shine in the darkness so that all will see that we are your disciples.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Lord our God, we pray for our mixed up, muddled and compromised world.

May those who lead peoples and nations be inspired to work in ways that benefit all whom they are called to serve.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Where tyranny, violence or oppression spread injustice, may those who know the truth be stirred to challenge and transform situations, for the good of all.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Thank you for those who provide health and vaccination services. May such resources be shared among nations, that all humanity may attain fulness of life.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for Your Church that we may demonstrate the humility and love of Jesus, declaring in word and deed your immeasurable love.

By Your Holy Spirit may we live ever to Your glory, that others may come to know their place in Your family.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in Heaven
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory
Forever and ever Amen

The Celtic Knot

The love of God goes round and around,
intertwining like a Celtic knot, and those who
follow Christ, those who love the Father and
who love the Son also are caught up in love for
one another.

More than that, we are caught up in a love for
the world, and those around us. Just as Jesus
reached out with loving kindness to those
around him,
so must we reach out to those around us.

It is a good time to remind ourselves, that our
work as Christians is not to hide ourselves
away behind closed doors on a Sunday
morning, but to be out there in the communities

we live in, and further afield, to show and share
the love of Jesus.

Jesus says – abide in my love.

Abide in my love and be fruitful.

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Amen

Song We seek your Kingdom

Sung to the tune Eventide, "Abide with me"

We seek your kingdom throughout every
sphere,
We long for heaven's demonstration here,
Jesus your light shine bright for all to see,
Transform, revive and heal society.

Before all things, in him all things were made,
Inspiring culture, media and trade,
May all our work serve your economy,
Transform, revive and heal society.

Peace, truth and justice reigning everywhere,
With us be present in our public square,
Fill all who lead with your integrity,
Transform, revive and heal society.

Forgive us Lord when we have not engaged.
Failing to scribe your heart on history's page,
Make us again what we were meant to be,
Transform, revive and heal society.

Faithful to govern, ever may we be,
Faithful in service, loving constantly,
In everything may your authority,
Transform, revive and heal society.
*Noel Robinson, Andy Flannagan, Graham Hunter. c
2016 Downwardly mobile music.*

Blessing

May the Grace of Jesus Christ
and the Love of God
and the Fellowship of the Spirit be with us.

The Lord bless us and keep us
His face shine upon us
His grace and peace rest on us.
Amen

Graham Pentelow 2021