

LP

Readers' Service

Love Changes Everything

by

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ORDER OF SERVICE

LOVE CHANGES EVERYTHING

The pattern of our worship today is three-fold. We begin with **COMING TO GOD**. We approach him through the opening hymn and prayers. Then, in his acknowledged presence, we have the opportunity of **LISTENING TO GOD** through Bible readings and the sermon. Finally, there is **RESPONDING TO GOD**. We use closing hymns, prayers and the offertory to make our appropriate response.

COMING TO GOD

Call to worship:

Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!

HYMN NO: 31 (H&P) - 'Come, let us all unite and sing - God is love!'

We come to God in prayer.

LET US PRAY:

Lord God our heavenly Father, you are truly love. You have shown yourself to us in so many ways. All of them tell us of your power, compassion and care which never change.

Love in the beginning created the universe and made each and every thing we see around us. Your creative love fashioned humankind out of the dust of the earth and touches each and every person with life-giving strength. We praise and thank you, Lord God, for your creating love.

Love in Jesus shows us your heart, Father. We adore you for those glimpses in him of your love for all, a love which shone out of his deeds of compassion and his words of truth. Above all we thank you that love brought Jesus to the cross. Yet the love which was crucified is risen indeed and brings ever fresh and new promise for the future. We praise and thank you, Lord God, for your redeeming love.

We bring you our gratitude that we can know your love within each of us through the Holy Spirit. Your love meets our needs and gives us hope through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We praise and thank you, Lord God, for your sustaining love.

Let us now confess our sins to God. Father, you are love and we are not like you. Forgive all our protestations of love to each other and to you which have come to nothing. We have grieved you, hurt others and harmed ourselves by lovelessness. Cleanse us and make us new again. May we rejoice in a love which forgives even all our sins.

Teach us to put our faith in you rather than ourselves so that loving you we may love one another and all people with a transforming, renewing love like that of Jesus our Lord and Saviour, in whose name we offer these prayers. Amen.

LISTENING TO GOD

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: HOSEA CHAPTER 14:4-9

Hosea's personal experience of a faithless wife mirrors the far greater anguish God feels at seeing his people reject his love. But God cannot be false to his own nature and the prophecy ends with a description of what divine love can do.

**HYMN NO: 45 (H&P) - 'The great love of God
Is revealed in the Son'.**

OR

HYMN NO: 182 (H&P) - 'We sing the praise of him who died'.

LESSON FROM THE EPISTLE: ROMANS CHAPTER 12:9-21

In a series of short, pithy sayings Paul describes the nature of love as it is expressed in the practical details of everyday life.

THE GOSPEL READING: JOHN CHAPTER 15:7-17

Jesus tells his disciples, just before his crucifixion, that love is the meaning of it all. We too can know his love and must show it to others.

HYMN NO: 42 (H&P) - 'O Love of God, how strong and true'.

THE SERMON (SEE ATTACHED SHEETS)

RESPONDING TO GOD

HYMN NO: 759 (H&P) - 'Jesus, Lord, we look to thee'.

LET US PRAY:

After the words, *'May we pray in faith'*, the response is *'Love changes everything'*.

'Jesus, Lord, we look to thee'. 'Let us for each other care'.

We pray for the Church.

'Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it'. We ask you to bless this church, its members, friends and leaders. We ask you to enrich its life and renew our love for one another. We ask you, Lord, to bless the other churches in the circuit and

neighbouring churches. May your love enable us to see that we are more deeply united in you than divided amongst ourselves.

Leader: May we pray in faith

Response: Love changes everything

We pray for the World.

'God so loved the world that He gave us his Son'. We ask you to bless the affairs of people and of nations that those who hold high office and exercise power may recognise humbly that they need divine wisdom to make and take decisions which affect the welfare of millions. May they realise and act upon the truths that love is greater than hate, that mercy is better than harshness and that good is stronger than evil. We ask you, Lord, to bless people of good will all over the world who try to express reconciliation, establish justice, bring about peace and care for the poverty-stricken and hungry. [Mention places or areas of topical concern].

Leader: May we pray in faith

Response: Love changes everything

We pray for the Person.

'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' We ask you to bless those in need, trouble or distress. May the bereaved know the comfort of your love. [PAUSE]. May the sick know the healing of your love. [PAUSE]. May the worried know the peace of your love. [PAUSE]. May the tempted know the strength of your love. [PAUSE]. May the downcast know the joy of your love. [PAUSE]. We ask you, Lord, to bless us and those we pray for in the way your love sees that we need.

Leader: May we pray in faith

Response: Love changes everything

So, Lord, may we give ourselves in love to you, who will always love us to the end of time. We make our response in prayer as we say together

THE LORD'S PRAYER

NOTICES AND OFFERTORY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

With our gifts, O God, we offer ourselves. As you have loved us so much, may we give ourselves in love to you to be used in your service. Amen.

HYMN NO: 747 (H&P) - 'Saviour from sin, I wait to prove'.

OR

HYMN NO: 48 (H&P) - 'Thy ceaseless, unexhausted love'.

BLESSING:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.

THE SERMON

LOVE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Alex Cameron, a Scottish veterinary surgeon who later went into the ministry of the Church, wrote about his experiences in a book entitled 'A Vet in the Vestry'. Naturally enough, he drew upon incidents in the first area of work which illustrated truths he expounded later as a Christian minister.

He recollected on one occasion how he had been summoned to a farm. Could the vet help to extricate a cow stuck fast in deep mud? But all his efforts, plus the brute force of ten men, a tractor and a horse failed to dislodge the cow. They were giving up in despair when someone had the idea of bringing the cow's calf to its mother. That did the trick. When the cow saw and heard her calf, she roused herself to a tremendous effort and, co-operating with the human help, she was soon safe. It was mother love that transformed the situation.

1. Love has the power to change others

The theme of the song 'Love Changes Everything' from Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical 'Aspects of Love' is the power of love to alter and transform people and situations. Listen to the words of the third verse:

*'Off into the world we go, planning futures, shaping years.
Love bursts in and suddenly all our wisdom disappears
Love makes fools of everyone
All the rules we make are broken
Yes love changes everyone; live or perish in its flame
Love will never never let you be the same'.*

Love does indeed change everything and everyone.

Of course, the song was not intended to be religious. Yet its sentiments can be very helpful when viewed in a Christian context. The love of which the New Testament speaks is powerful in its ability to effect change. But love's power is not of the brute force kind, which failed with the cow. It is of the mother-love, other-love sort which can move mountains and make life better.

Dr Anthony Clare, who runs the successful radio series 'In the Psychiatrist's Chair', has a particularly sensitive way of enabling people to reveal deep things within themselves. As a result of all his listening he deserves therefore to be listened to when he gives his summary of what people's real needs are. He says 'People can survive anything if they have even one major support; love, a talent, family, work. The ones who go under are those who have absolutely nothing to rely on'.

As Christians, we would probably say of that list of supports; 'and the greatest of these is love'. For it makes all the difference in the world to know that someone loves you. Above

all, even if in human terms we happen to be lonely or isolated, the love of God in Jesus is available for each one of us. But to make a difference to people's self-confidence and their feeling of worth, that love of God must be channelled through other people.

So whether it is friendship, kindness, practical help or sympathy another person feels that they matter. In that way love makes a difference and has the potential to bring about positive change. A family spoke of the impact a much-loved aunt had had on their development as human beings. *'Aunt Lois always listened to us children'* they reported *'no matter what kind of question we had. Whenever we approached Aunt Lois we didn't get just an answer, we got her. She would squat down nose to nose with us. She made us feel important. We had something important to ask, something worth bending down and listening to. Aunt Lois gave us self-worth'*. Love makes a difference for the better.

In the New Testament, love is not so much an emotion as an action. It is doing something practical for the welfare of another. Love changes everything because it makes the one on the receiving end feel better and be better. Something quite straightforward like a helpful act or a kindly smile or a sympathetic enquiry or a simple job done is love in action. Others are changed for the better. Love has the power to change the other.

2. Secondly, love has the power to change you.

The Swiss psychiatrist and Christian, Paul Tournier, observed once that those who become creative and original personalities are not the ones who live their own lives but those who forget themselves in giving themselves for others. Growth and maturity in our own personalities come not from concentrating upon ourselves but in being concerned about someone else. This was a truth often stressed by that remarkable Christian Catherine Bramwell Booth, granddaughter of the founder of the Salvation Army. She died at the age of over 100 some years ago but was often to be seen on TV in her late nineties, full of sparkle and common sense. Interviewed on her 100th birthday she summed up her Christian philosophy: *'I'm in love with life and life is loving. If you haven't learnt to love someone else better than yourself, you haven't begun to live'*.

The implication is plain. Loving makes life better for you and not just the other person. Love can change everything in you as well as benefiting somebody else.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta is well known for her practical caring in love for others, especially the most unfortunate and destitute. Yet an incident also illustrates the truth that love changes the person who loves as well as blessing those on the receiving end. She was on a plane journey sitting next to an American businessman. She began to use the rosary explaining that the different colours of the beads represented areas of the world. *'I pray for the poor on each continent'* she said. Although only a nominal Catholic, the businessman joined in. Noticing this, she handed her rosary over to him and told him to start using it regularly but also to lend it out. That was the beginning of a chain of blessings as a series of people received the rosary as it was passed on at a time of need.

The businessman, Jim Castle, wondered later if there was a special power in those beads. Protestants would probably prefer his alternative conclusion that somehow God's Holy Spirit is able to renew the human spirit because the act of lovingly passing on the beads to someone

else in need makes the giver better. It is likely that individuals were blessed in themselves, not by selfish keeping but by selfless giving. In any case Jim Castle's summary of the way his own life had been changed for the better is applicable to all of us. *'I try to remember what really counts. The way we love each other'*. In giving, we receive. Love changes us.

3. But thirdly, love's power to change can sometimes hurt.

Love's very nature means that we may have to bear its cost. The gospels speak often of painful sacrifice in standing up for our Lord in the way of love. In our readings we could hear notes of anguish. Hosea felt in himself God's agony at love rejected. Paul in Romans describes the practical outworking of love which might cause pain. It would be much more comfortable to think only of yourself. To love, on the other hand, can open us up to inconvenience and sacrifice. Yet Jesus tells us that love is always worth it in the end. We partake of the divine nature in loving as He loved.

The Eastern Orthodox Church speaks of two martyrdoms. The red, of blood, is the calling of a few. The white however is the suffering of the heart, a martyrdom lived out by all Christians at times in the daily self-sacrificing of loving others. It can be painful to put others needs before your own, to give up time or energy or something that matters to you in order to help someone else. But Jesus gave Himself in love. He is both our example and our enabling. His painful but triumphantly fulfilling self sacrifice on the cross makes Him truly our Saviour and Lord. We love because He first loved us. Although we may sometimes experience hurt in trying to live as He did, we shall find that love does change everything for others and for ourselves.