

## Notes on 2 Cor 5 : 14 & 15 'Daring to think the unremarkable – a question of love'

I read this week of an unremarkable request, a man asked if he could see the chaplain at the Victoria Barracks in Windsor. However, this request was not as harmless as it seemed because all that he was doing was trying to cadge for himself free board and lodgings at the army's expense! In John 21 Jesus asks an unremarkable if relentless question of Peter, do you love me? This was my ordination text which meant that it was not just Peter who squirmed and I am continue to squirm 31 years later!! Paul understood and lived out Jesus' relentless question as both a Pharisee and a Christian because Jesus' question was the same question God asked Israel in the Old Testament. However, Paul no longer answers the question as a fanatic for the Torah, but as a fanatic of and for the cross. Let me ask you an unremarkable question, why are we to evangelise, to tell others the Good News of Jesus? The obvious answer is love!

When you think of God's love what is your response? Does your breath catch? Does your spirit soar? Does your mind boggle? Or is it merely a case of 'thinking the unremarkable' because none of us are in shock, none of us are overawed and none of us think that this is impossible. In fact, you may be as moved by God's love as you are by the fact that May 4<sup>th</sup> was Star Wars Day!! The same cannot be said for Paul as he was transformed utterly by God's love. In 2 Corinthians 5 verses 14 and 15 he describes his experience of this love as being like in a carpenter's vice which holds the wood tight allowing the carpenter to do with the wood what he wishes. Paul feels the pressure of the grip of God's love in his heart, his mind and his soul and it is this which motivates him so. Do you know this grip in your life? Are you like my grandson Arthur who only wants a little hug because I do get carried away and hug him too tightly. Can you imagine what would happen to me if Gareth Braisdell gave me a full-on hug? You can almost hear my ribs popping because of his strength and my inability to resist!! This is exactly what Jesus' relentless question all about. It is not about us doing a Bible study on or about God's love because this is to start in the wrong place, that is in your minds. What Paul is describing here in 2 Corinthians 5 verses 14 and 15 is an epistemology, that is a way of knowing, which is grounded in love above all things. It is to know God's love in heart, it is to know you are loved by God, it is to know our identity as a child of God and his treasuring of you. It is to know the Spirit's gripping and guiding of you as described in 'Everyday Supernatural'. The American evangelist, Dwight Moody, had such an experience of God in 1871 when he asked God to stay his hand because it was such an overwhelming experience, but it was this knowing of God's love that changed him to be the evangelist who was so used by God to change the lives of so many.

Paul's heart is fully persuaded and convinced regarding the nature and demands of this love and what was his response to this love? It is to love as Jesus does. This is why we are told the tales of his missionary journeys because in

them we see his acts of love, as in Acts 16 verse 18 and his setting free this slave girl from demonic possession. In Acts 13 verses 5 and 9 to 11 we hear the words of truth as he speaks to the Jews in the Synagogue and to Elymas the Sorcerer. He speaks the words of the Gospel as in Acts 14 verse 1 to those in Iconium and they hear and believe. In Acts 16 verse 10 and 18 verses 9 and 10 he describes visions and words from God encouraging him and gripping him. These verses describe how Paul was compelled by God's love, and this love is to compel us too.

In the 70 Acts of service to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee this is what numbers 9–16 encourage us to do:

9. Leave something anonymously for someone you know: a coffee on a desk, an encouraging note taped to their car, a box of pastries left in the shared kitchen.
10. Ask others what they think your gifts are, and how you could use them to bring life in and through your community, then act on what they tell you. While you're at it, encourage others to use their gifts too!
11. Become an Age UK Digital Buddy. Half of people over 65 feel out of touch with the pace of modern life. Learn how to inspire older people in your community to make the most of technology. [www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/become-an-age-uk-digital-buddy/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/become-an-age-uk-digital-buddy/)
12. Allow extra time when you are out and about and look for simple ways to be generous – help someone carry a heavy bag, offer directions, acknowledge passers-by.
13. Take a chunk of time to chat to someone you might not usually 'see': the street vendor, the window cleaner, the station attendant, the homeless person who sits in the doorway.
14. The Do It Trust connects you on the spot with a volunteer opportunity near you. Find a way to instantly bless your community here. [www.do-it.org/about](http://www.do-it.org/about)
15. Set a target to encourage everyone you talk with today. Everyone. This might actually be easier than you think – choose to prioritise encouraging words whenever you speak to others and it will come naturally.
16. Spend time drafting an intentional message telling an old friend or teacher about their impact on you. What might you write on a sincere thank you card? Send that.

What is your reaction to these? Are you compelled or gripped by fear or are you willing to learn the way of love because love, as it says in 1 John 4 verse 18, casts out all fear? The 70 Acts of Service are ways we are to use to learn what it means for us to be compelled by God's love. They are ways to help us learn more of God's love within our lives and to learn what it is like to be motivated by love whether by doing or in speaking of Jesus to others. This is what Anne Turk shared with us this morning and why she sent her friend a 'Try Praying' booklet.

On most Wednesdays you will find me helping at William Levick school. I do this because I want to bless and to be a demonstration of the love of Jesus in this school. This takes different forms. It can be by my listening to readers, it can be my taking RE workshops at Christmas and Easter, it can be me playing my ukulele or by having wet sponges thrown at me which I have just been booked into by the Head and the PTA!! One of the ways I like most is when I walk through the dining hall dishing out high 5's to the children who are having their lunch there. This week I saw Benj Keen and what he said to me and to his friends was priceless, 'Andy goes to my church!!' I help out at school because the love of God in Christ has gripped my heart so, and what said helps as well. May this same love grip your heart and compel you to preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, to use words.

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1. What is your response to Jesus' question 'Do you love me'?
2. What is your reaction to the love of God we know in Jesus?
3. What does Paul mean when he speaks of being compelled by the love of Christ?
4. What does it mean to have an epistemology, that is a way of knowing, which is grounded in love? Is this true for you?
5. How do Paul's missionary journeys describe and explain this an epistemology of love?
6. When you read these 8 acts of service how did you react? Were you afraid? How can they help us learn what it means to be compelled by God's love?
7. How do these 8 acts help us to preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, to use words?