

Notes on Eph 1 : 15-19, 3 : 14–21; Deut 1 : 6–8 ‘The Call of Love’ 12<sup>th</sup> Jan 2025

The tabloids adore a good love story. This week it is the astonishing twists and turns of the Elon Musk and Nigel Farage ‘bromance’ and how it is falling apart, its intrigues and drama, magnified by the power of social media, especially of X and it’s all set in the goldfish bowl of national politics! A good love story is the heart of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and Paul loved and lived in this story too. It is what motivated him, as in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 14 and it is the heart of his two prayers for this church in Ephesus and it is his prayer for us too.

Do you have you a favourite film style? Are you a rom com fan, do you like a good chick flick, what about a murder mystery, or the thrills of an action film, does science fiction float your boat or are you a fantasy fan? Whatever your choice of style all films, regardless of type, usually have some form of love interest to add to the mix. Paul definitely has a love interest. It was the heart of his being a Pharisee and Deuteronomy 1 verses 6 – 8 describes this love interest to a tee. But all of this was turned on its head when Paul discovered the shape God’s love took in Acts 9, and to his great horror it was cross shaped. Paul was so overwhelmed by this revelation that he spent the rest of his life exploring more and more what the height and length and breadth and depth of this cross shaped love was. He explored how it described God, us, the mission of God, the Covenant, our hope, the salvation God gives, our being the holy people of God and Scripture. This four-dimensional love shaped his understanding of and vision for the church both then and for us now.

Covenant Sunday is when we place ourselves afresh on and in this love. We publicly declare that it is this love which defines us; it is this love which motivates us; it is this love which inspires us and it is this love which sustains us. We see this love in action in Deuteronomy as described in chapter 1 verses 6 – 8 where we are told what God’s love looks like, how it defines Israel’s identity as those who are blessed by God and why Israel is to live in faithful, loving obedience to this Exodus shaped God. If Israel loves and lives like this then they will stay in the land and they will fulfil their vocation in being God’s priests and kings. If they don’t love and live this way, then they will be expelled from the land as Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. This is the heart of Paul’s two prayers which outline an epistemology of love (how we know God), an encounter with love (our worship of God) and our being filled by love (our holiness). These three elements are the heart of the Temple theology we are called to live out in our lives. Temple theology describes God’s living among us by his Spirit, as in chapter 3 verses 17 to 19, and we called to explore and immerse ourselves in this love – well we are Baptists after all!!

This love is the heart of our three E's for us as individual lovers of Jesus and they describe our life as a church living as the multi-generational family of God and as the multi-generational servants of Jesus serving him through the many ministries of this church. It is the heart of our strap line as a church which I have not referred to enough in my time here, which is sharing God's love. This is what I pray for you as your Pastor when I pray for this this four-dimensional God to be in and among us.

Is this your heart too? If so, then how are you to respond? Firstly, by enabling the areas of ministry highlighted by the Shape of Future Ministries to flourish. These ministries are prayer ministry, small groups, teaching and worship. Secondly, it is by your giving and our giving tree which celebrates whatever extra giving we are able to give this year to cover our £22,000 expected overspend. Thirdly, is the step of membership. Today is Covenant Sunday and membership is a public covenant shared between a group of people and to become a member is a crucial step in growing our sense of belonging together but also being part of those who enable all what we pray and work towards to be fulfilled. Fourthly, but not finally, it is how we live out our strapline of Sharing God's Love among us as church as well as with all who don't yet know Jesus. We do this as we live out our Doing Life Together ministry model with all our heart, our mind, our body and our strength for the sake and glory of Jesus.