

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 27 August 2017 **Called to Love**

Pray Thank God that his love defines the true meaning of love. Give thanks for the supreme demonstration of unconditional love shown to us particularly through Jesus' life and death.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). 1 John 4:7-21.

Background As is the case now there was in 1st century society quite a range of understanding of the nature of love. Some might argue that the free and easy, casual approach adopted by many to "love" is reminiscent of the lax standards of the times when John was writing. In any event, he focusses on the generous, self-giving, unconditional love of God shown to us especially poignantly, in the sacrificial death of Jesus. His love for us, shown in his death, was not provisional or conditional. That, said John, shows us the real nature of love. It puts all our other understandings of what love is into perspective. Not only does it prompt us to express our gratitude to God but it also offers us a sign, a pointer, to how all love is to be understood. With this insight and his blessing we are to be open to change our attitudes and demonstration of love to God and to one another

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Try to think of as many different contexts in which we use the word "love". How do we differ in meaning even when we use the same word? Some people have suggested that we have debased the word (love) – what do you think?
2. On Sunday we thought a little about love for God, love for family or very close friends, romantic or sexual love. We use the same word – love. How does our understanding of the same word differ in these (and perhaps other) uses? How does John's use of the word differ from these? Add to our understanding of love in these different areas?
3. How does the issue of conditional/unconditional love affect the different areas? Love is surely more than "I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine". Responses are still expected but there is a difference between self giving love offered unconditionally and love that in practice hemmed in by all kinds of caveats. What is your view of this?
4. In the arena of negotiation, it is though unwise in the extreme to give away something without agreeing a concession from the "other side" in exchange. How does God's actions particularly in Jesus' death call this kind of thinking into question? I'm thinking of the word "grace" here – does that ring any bells for you? How does God's way of thinking and acting (esp in regard to love and grace) differ from normal human dealings? What have we to learn here?
5. God obviously wants us to respond to his love but his love for us is given "up front" and does not depend on our response. Does that mean his love goes to waste if we fail to respond? What does that say about God's generosity? Unconditional love does send out a strong signal to the recipient – how ready are we to respond positively? To what extent do we take God's love for granted? How might we act differently to ensure that we respond positively?
6. Anything else arising from the service or the passage?

Prayer Lord, thank you for your generous and unconditional love, offered in Jesus your Son. Help us to warm to it and to be faithful and generous and open in our response of love towards you and our neighbour. Amen.