



With All Your Heart

A sermon by Revd Katherine Hedderly

Reading: Luke 10.25-37

You may be wondering where Linnea's name comes from. If you know Jen and Clare well you'll guess it has some botanical connection and you'd be right. Karl Linnaeus was someone who loved the natural world. He was a Swedish botanist and zoologist of the 1700's who formalised the two part naming system (known as bi-nomial nomenclature) that's used to classify all life forms, animals as well as plants, and human beings. Two well-known examples would be - *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, or *Homo Sapiens*. He had a real sense of wonder for living things and expressed it by wanting to name them and he was very much caught up with natural theology, so popular at that time, that sought to understand God simply through reason and the evidence of the natural world.

So the origin of Linnea's name points us to what we are about today in this baptism. Being named and loved. In baptism Linnea is known and loved by God for the unique little human person that she is. God has a particular love for each one of us. Not just for 'homo sapiens' as a species 'in general' but each of us individually. His love is particular, not general. He knows each one of us by name. We see that reflected in the words that are spoken to Jesus at his own baptism. 'You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.' God's love is personal.

Right from the beginning we hear in Genesis that God orders things so that humans can enter the divine life, as part of his creation. God creates and names human beings and so enters into relationship with us, making it possible for us to bear the 'image of God' in our lives. In baptism we are baptised in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and into a new life. A life with his Son, so that we too can know that same intimate relationship with the Father, know ourselves as God's 'beloved' and be Christ-bearers to the world.

Yesterday at our Parish Away Day, which was entitled '*Teach us to Pray*' we explored some of the ways that we can know and experience that particular relationship that God offers to us, our own belonging to God through prayer. Part of being in relationship with someone is wanting to spend time with them. And yesterday we spent time with God in many different ways. We explored intercessory prayer as we brought the needs of our world and our neighbour before God; through Ignatian prayer, using our imagination to enter into a gospel passage and experience life alongside Jesus and his disciples, reflecting back on our day, becoming aware of the times when God had been most present to us, giving thanks in the detail of our lives. We allowed silent meditation to let heart to speak to heart; art to unlock the creative potential in us, music to add a deeper meaning to the words of familiar prayer, and many other forms of prayer too. It was a day where there was a palpable sense of belonging to one another and to God – of being 'beloved'. It was particularly poignant to see some of our C-Club walking the prayer labyrinth, reflectively and prayerfully, each one, even the smallest, walking their own unique path with God. And at the centre of the day a silent Eucharist where we had a sense of being a community alive with the spirit of God's grace.

But this isn't about being a cosy club full of warm feelings about God and one another, it is about being a people that are sent to live that love in the world, in a way that addresses the needs of our world, our society at this uncertain time, and the individuals we encounter day-by-day.

This week at General Synod Justin Welby opened the debate on the EU Referendum vote with a call for the church to be: “a holy community, placing the poorest at the front of our minds, renewed in joy and boundless love for each other and neighbour, that is expressed in action and shown in worship and prayer.”¹

Being a holy community means being those who are confident in the generosity of God’s love poured out for each one of us, and ready to share that love generously ourselves.

In our Gospel reading we find Jesus teaching what it means to be those who are named and loved by God; loved so wholeheartedly that we cannot help but offer that same love to our neighbour. In his encounter with the lawyer Jesus shows him that God’s love is particular. The covenant love that God invites us into is not something that is general. It is not just a keeping of the law like the priest and Levite but a love that demands more of us because God doesn’t just love us ‘generally’, he loves us as individuals and experiencing this love ourselves we are compelled us to love others in the same way.

Like the love that forms the heart of Israel’s relationship with God as his covenant people, it is a call to fidelity with God. God’s love requires a response. It’s costly for us because it costs God everything, even the life of his ‘beloved, his Son’.

We are called to love God “with all our heart, with all our strength, with all our soul and with all our mind. And to love our neighbour as ourselves.”

God’s claim on us involves all parts of our lives. Our inner selves, our identity, our abilities and strengths, as well as our intellectual resources and our understanding.

No part of ourselves is to be withheld from God.

The key word for each of us here is ‘all’. What kind of people are we if we love like this? What does this ‘all’ mean for you? All your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your might...? What might loving in that way look like for you?

As we look at the parable. Who is giving ‘all’ here? The priest and the Levite, may think they are giving all by following the letter of the law. But, fearful of being made unclean by the wounded man, following the law means that they avoid him, passing by on the other side. It is the Samaritan, the one who is the most despised outsider, who breaks through the barriers of ethnic and religious prejudice to minister to his fellow human being in need. He is the one who responds fully, who gives all. He turns aside, goes to the man, cleans and dresses his wounds, takes him to the inn, takes care of him, and covers the cost of his convalescence, offering to pay more if needed. He is generous, practical, gentle and thoughtful. He models what living out this ‘all’ means. His actions are full of love and generosity.

When Jesus asks the lawyer which of the three is the neighbour to the man, he can’t even bring himself to say ‘the Samaritan’, but says ‘the one who showed him mercy’. Jesus has turned his original question ‘Who is my neighbour?’ around.

In his book ‘The Hospitality of God’² Brendan Byrne says, ‘At the end of the parable it is not a question of where and how far I should draw the limits of the notion of ‘neighbour’ – to see how far

¹ <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5747/synod-archbishop-opens-debate-on-eu-referendum>

² The Hospitality of God, Brendan Byrne, Liturgical Press, 2000

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Hospitality-God-Reading-Lukes-Gospel/dp/0814623905>

my obligations of 'love' extend. It is a question of imitating the hospitality shown by this despised outsider. The concept of 'neighbour' shifts and becomes a quality or vocation that I take upon myself and actively live out, rather than being a description that I may, or may not apply to another. Taking up this vocation is the way to inherit eternal life.'

The God who we are trying to love with all our heart is the one who is already reaching out with love and compassion to the stranger. Our way of living out this way of loving with 'all of ourselves' means becoming an instrument of God's 'all' for others. Be open to see how God is inviting you to do that. It is our true vocation as 'God's beloved'. It is a journey that Linnea has begun today.

Yesterday, we were the recipients of that love ourselves, as members of the Sunday International Group, who are themselves on the fringes of belonging in this country, showed us the hospitality of God in the way they lovingly served us throughout the day. In simple generous ways they showed us God's love, and they turned being loved by a neighbour into being loved by a friend.