St Martins C3 – October 3, 2021

Focus on Mission – Love is the Motivation

Sermon Notes:

We need to start by coming to an understanding of mission – what is it? The word 'mission' comes from the Latin meaning 'to send'. Mission is about believers in Jesus being sent out into the world. Mission is for all of us, not just the gifted few.

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17–20

It all starts with a consideration of 'why' – why would we do something that might embarrass us, or even cause us to lose a friend or a job?

The answer is, simply, that we really understand the love of God. Only when we understand the love of God, will we be motivated towards missions.

Two great stories that show something of the love of God are the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). Both give us a glimpse of how God loves people who are less than perfect.

Arguably the best insight into how God loves is in the story of the prodigal son.

Read Luke 15:11-32

The son deeply insults the father and walks away, going just about as far from the father as he can. But the father is watching and waiting; never forgetting the son or eagerly hoping that he will return. When the son returns the father – in a very culturally inappropriate and shameful way – runs to the son and showers him with kisses. He does not lecture or chide, he just gives love abundantly. He then takes action to restore the son and show that the relationship is back to where it should be.

This is what our God is like. It does not depend on our faithfulness. When we walk away, He can't wait for us to return.

The big question is: how do we respond to this? Some of us will resist it. Some of us won't know it at all. Some of us will see God is angry and hostile.

We need to reckon with these reactions and allow Him to heal our hearts if we are going to be effective in communicating His love to others.

We need to genuinely see the 'good news' as 'good', or our efforts to share it will last only as long as our guilt or sense of obligation lasts (which is usually not very long). When we dwell in God's love, and experience it, mission becomes a natural – though still sometimes challenging – process for us to take.

Questions for Connect Groups:

Do you really feel like God loves you? Does he like you?

If you struggle to say 'yes', why is that?

Do we think of God as he truly is, or do we 'project' onto God our experiences with significant authority figures in our lives?

Does your idea of God have anything to do with your experience of your parents?

Should we 'do mission' and share our faith simply out of a sense of obedience, regardless of how we feel about Him?

Are there any limitations to this?

How important is it that our mission activities are rooted in knowing the love of God?

What happens if they are not? Does it matter?

What makes the 'good news' good to you?

As you think about this, does it make you want to share God with other people?

Monday's Devotion – Love, not religion.

Read: John 3: 1-21

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (v:3)

Nicodemus was an intelligent, dedicated man who was a respected leader in the community. That didn't happen by accident. For Nicodemus to gain a leadership position in the Jewish ruling council, he would have had to live a very disciplined life. From a young age he would have devoted himself to the strict observance of all the Jewish laws.

In this conversation we see that which was his greatest strength was also his greater weakness. We come to know God when we respond appropriately to the love He has reached out to us with. Nicodemus struggled with this concept, because he thought favour with God was gained through following all the religious rules.

At the heart of Christianity is a relationship of love. Yes, religious rituals have their place, to remind us of that love God has for us, but let us always keep in mind the essence of our faith. That is, positively responding to God's love.

When we live from a foundation of love, our motivation for mission is aligned with God's heart.

Tuesday's Devotion – Respond with surrender

Read: Matthew 19:16-26

How we respond to the love that God expresses to us matters.

The rich young man in this account, is not dissimilar to Nicodemus. He is successful and self-sufficient. He knows he ought to follow God and probably wants to, but he doesn't see the need to replace what he has been relying on with God's love. He wants to add what Jesus has to offer to his life, but he is not willing to give up what he already has to obtain it.

Many people today would be like this. Would we like to experience the life and love that God has for us? – Absolutely. Are we prepared to surrender everything else in our lives for it? – Yeah, nah.

Surrender or sacrifice is the purest form of love. Because it deals with the essence of who God created us to be. We were created with freewill. A freewill we can use to serve ourselves and get what we want, or a freewill we can use to surrender what we want in order to experience true love. We can't experience true love without surrender, we may want to, but it just isn't possible.

May we respond to God's love with a full surrender of our lives to Him.

Wednesday's Devotion – Do you want wholeness?

Read: John 5: 1-15

"Do you want to get well?"

Our brokenness can become so familiar to us, that we give up all hope of healing. Then when love and wholeness are offered to us, we don't see the opportunity, or don't feel worthy to take the opportunity presented to us.

For the man in this situation, the issue was a significant physical ailment. For us it could be physical, emotional, mental, relational or financial. We may have lived so long with an aspect of our lives broken, that we miss the opportunity to discover wholeness.

Is Jesus able to heal our brokenness and make us whole? – Absolutely. The question He puts to us is the same question he put to the man at the pool, "do you want to be well?"

God doesn't force His love on anyone. God is looking for those who will seek it out. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matt 7:7-8) Are you asking, seeking and knocking, or have you resigned yourself to your brokenness?

Thursday's Devotion – Love brings life.

Read: Matthew 9:1-8

I love this story. There is so much going on here. The obvious thing to everyone present was the physical paralysis of the man who was in need of healing, but Jesus doesn't initially deal with the obvious. Jesus knows the man's heart and extends God's forgiveness to him. Jesus gives him eternal life. We need to keep in mind that God's primary expression of love is salvation of our souls.

However, God's love doesn't stop with salvation. God's love is able to bring wholeness to every area of our lives. So, a few minutes later, Jesus heals him of paralysis as well. The man is able to go away whole. He is physically whole, spiritually whole and likely as a consequence mentally and socially whole as well.

Another interesting aspect of this story is the interaction Jesus has with his critics. Unlike the paralytic they miss out on experiencing God's love and life. Their desire to be right, has blinded them to the life that is available to them.

May our hearts and lives embrace all that Christ is. May respond with openness, so that we come to experience the fullness of life that He has for us.

Friday's Devotion – In need of grace?

Read: John 8:1-11

"Then neither do I condemn you… go now and leave your life of sin."

Have you sinned recently? Do you need God's grace? Do you need a second chance? We may think that we wouldn't do something as bad as this woman, but any sin we commit has the potential to condemn us, if it weren't for God's grace.

We don't know the story of this woman's life. I suspect that she wasn't a prostitute, because the Jewish didn't usually drag prostitutes out and stone them, so it is quite likely that this was an affair or something like that. Therefore, up until recently, she may have lived a morally good life and for whatever reason made some recent poor choices. Whichever way it is, Jesus gives her a second chance.

We all need second chances. That is what love offers. Love extends grace. Love helps us turn from our sin and live the life God has for us again.

So, be encouraged today. God's love is immense. It won't give up on you, it will extend second chances, it will make you whole. The only question is, will we respond positively to the love that is on offer?