

LIVING IN LOVE

We read in Luke 3: “.....the Holy Spirit descended on him (Jesus) in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” “

Because Jesus deeply believed and felt loved, He could fulfil His destiny on earth. How could this apply to you and me.

The Holy Spirit helps us internalize the message that we are loved! That God is well pleased with you.

Everyone is welcome to experience Gods love.

On the doors of the Coventry Cathedral they regularly hang a welcome. It says;

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, straight, gay, confused, well-heeled or down at heel. We especially welcome wailing babies and excited toddlers.

We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're 'just browsing,' just woken up or just got out of prison. We don't care if you're more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury, or haven't been to church since Christmas ten years ago.

We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome keep-fit mums, football dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, latte-sippers, vegetarians, junkfood eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like 'organised religion.'

We offer a welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or are here because granny is visiting and wanted to come to the Cathedral.

We welcome those who are inked, pierced, both or neither. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throat as kids or got lost on the ring road and wound up here by mistake. We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, doubters... and you! They all have probably in common that they long to be loved and belong.

LOVE THE MOST IMPORTANT KEY

Knowing with your head that you are loved and experientially knowing that

you are loved are two completely different things. That is why it is so important that we as a congregation are a place where people can feel loved. God so much desires that with every heartbeat, with every breath and with every brain wave that you feel loved.

God desires that His love will flow TO you, IN you, THROUGH you and AS you. You being a unique expression of Gods multi-coloured love.

That you and I out of the testimony of Gods transforming love will spread the love of God by the power and help of the Holy Spirit.

Illustrate:

My wife and I we met each other in Ede here in Holland as we where both part of Youth with a Mission.

Very shortly after we got married we went to New-Zealand, where we lived in Whakatane. A beautiful village in the Bay of Plenty. It sounds like paradise and in a way it was. It was also an area like everywhere in the world with much brokenness. At that time going back in time more than 25 years, New-Zealand had the second highest suicide rate among young men between 17-25 years old and where we lived had the second highest rate within New-Zealand.

We started a rehabilitation centre for men called Bethel-House. A house for men with life threatening problems. They all had a criminal record, came from broken backgrounds, wrestled with drugs and alcohol etc. Listening to their stories almost 70% had experienced various degrees of sexual abuse.

Explain:

I learned the importance of learning to love the one! Am I willing to truly sacrifice to learn what it means to love someone unconditionally. No matter what they have done or are still doing or will continue to do.

Unconditional love is the most powerful transforming essence and key there is.

There is a lot of confusion around the word love.

Love has to be one of the most misused and misunderstood words around. It is a commonly used or should we say abused word in our language. We talk about love, we write about love, we sing about love, we declare that we love doing and eating things that harm our body and we even kill each other in the name of love.

The absurdity of this situation is that whether we admit it or not, love is something that we all desperately crave and want and yet love is something

we ALL already are in essence, despite the fact that we might not be aware of it. For Love is a quality of the soul and it is found deep within the inner heart of EVERY human being. When we disconnect from this, we sense a 'loss' that then propels us forth on a quest to find the love we think we have 'lost'. However, we can't lose something that we are essentially made of, but we can choose to disconnect and not express it. And that is what we all have done.

It is this lack of connecting to and expressing love that hurts us and sets up the search for it elsewhere.

Without the work of the cross we cannot out of ourselves find the way back. The good news is that Jesus has reconnected us to what already was there the goodness of love. The Holy Spirit wants to help us to reconnect on the basis of the cross.

I want to suggest today three keys of learning to live in love.

Guard

First of all, 'guard your heart'.

It is not for nothing therefore that we read in Proverbs 4:23 "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

We all live in a broken world as I also illustrated with the men who came to Bethel House. We all have our stories. We all have broken hearts.

Loving yourself means to first become the missionary to your own heart and bring Gods love where it is not.

Because if God wants to heal our hearts with His Love, He needs all our broken pieces.

There are peace's in our hearts who are not yet reconnected to the love of God that is IN us. If we are not careful we seek the love where we think it is, but it is not. It brings more bondage than freedom, like trying the fill our pain with work, drugs, alcohol, food, Netflix etc.

State:

When the soul rids itself completely of what is offensive and unconformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love.

So which broken piece needs some reconnection with love? What area in your live do you find difficult to accept and love?

Which area remains maybe a secret even to those you love?

For something to be healed by love it needs to be brought into the light, into connection with someone you trust. Confess your sins to one another that you may be healed. Things in our lives that leads us in the wrong direction,

away from Gods light and love.

I want to encourage you even though you maybe feel afraid, what is the one thing today, you want to bring into relationship. So that also that area in your live might feel and experience the love of someone else.

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State: That is how we guard our hearts.

AWAKE

Secondly be ‘awake’ to Gods love! The question is; ‘are you awake, are you aware in the present moment of Gods love for you right now?’ You cannot be more loved than you are right now.

To be awake in our lives and to live authentically - meaning you are the same on the outside as you are on the inside - means, we need to give love and be able to receive love. We need to have love for ourselves in order to fully give it back to others. Love is at the core of who we are.

But, it’s not always easy. Sometimes we get wrapped up in our weaknesses and can’t see our strengths. It’s an ongoing journey, because loving ourselves unconditionally is a lifelong commitment. But it’s a commitment worth having.

Brené Brown a researcher who wrote several worthwhile reading books like ‘The power of vulnerability’, has some wonderful quotes to remind us on the days where we feel maybe not worthwhile enough to be connected with and loved. She always seems to say the right words, so let them soak up and fill you with the love you need today.

“We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness and affection.”

“Love is not something we give or get; it is something that we nurture and grow, a connection that can only be cultivated between two people when it exists within each one of them – we can only love others as much as we love ourselves.”

So are you awake and aware of Gods love and the love of others, those close around you? Are you living in the moment? Are you nurturing and cultivating these relationships? We often are so busy that we are to busy for God.

A wonderful key is to contemplate, to slow down.

Thomas Keating who recently passed away, brought contemplative centering prayer back into view. When we learn to become still, we learn to experience God's presence within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than consciousness itself. This method of prayer is both a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship.

State: So to consciously find creative ways that help us focus on God, helps us to stay awake to God. What concrete way helps you to stay focused?

ABIDING

There is a third important key I want to suggest today and that is abiding. In order to produce the fruit of love we need to guard where love resides, namely our hearts, be awake to love and abide in love.

How do you abide in love? What does that look like?

John the Apostle of Love wrote in 1John 4 *"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him"*.

Loving someone and to be loved, abiding in the love of the one you love feels very scary and vulnerable.

Because waking up every day and loving someone who may or may not love us back, whose safety we can't ensure, who may stay in our lives or may leave without a moment's notice, who may be loyal to the day they die or betray us tomorrow – that's vulnerability."

A deep sense of love and belonging is a deep need of all of us of all men, women, and children. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong.

From a human perspective love will never be certain.

From God's perspective His love remains – it is certain forever.

Jesus says; I love you just as the Father loves me; remain/abide in my love.

Abide means to remain, to stand fast, to go on being, to stay, to reside, to continue without change. That little word—abide—has profound meaning.

Living—abiding—in Christ can only be done through God's love.

Never could you have found God without love, and you cannot stay with Him without His love.

Are you abiding in love? Love is our origin and our destiny.

The Holy Spirit wants to help you.

John of the Cross writes: God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially, even though it may be that of the greatest sinner in the world. This union between God and creatures always exists. So you can lean into God's love, rest

in it, enjoy it, soak in it, be rooted in it, standing fast in it.

State: The Holy Spirit wants to help you **“live in Love”** by sustaining you breath by breath, heartbeat by heartbeat to guard your heart, being awake to Gods love and abide in His love.

You are Gods beloved son and daughter in whom He is well pleased.