



DYMA GARIAD: HERE IS LOVE
A Pastoral Letter from the Bishop of St Asaph
St Valentine, 14th February 2021.

The secular world makes a lot of “love”, by which it can mean a whole host of things ranging from affection to sex. It will all be on display this weekend. St Valentine’s Day is a good occasion to double the price of roses, to sell cards and chocolates, and generally celebrate romance.

Yet, deep down, it is in the nature of human beings to welcome a chance to celebrate love because, whether we are conscious of it or not, love resonates at the level of the deepest reality in us, because it is the fundamental nature of him who upholds creation and keeps us in being: God. When we held an exercise in the diocesan conference a number of years ago, people wanted “Love” to feature at the heart of the message we should convey as a Church, because we have an instinctive sense that this is God’s message to us, and is a message that the world needs to hear. Working out what this means, however, can be difficult because of the elasticity of the meaning of the word. Love has become what is called a “portmanteau” word today, since it can carry all sorts of meanings, and we can too easily reduce it to being about feelings or sentiment.

When Christians say “God is Love” we are in truth asserting the reality that drives the forces of creation, and which binds up its wounds. We are talking about a power tough enough to take on all the things that disfigure creation, as well as everything which we humans seem capable of inflicting on one another. God’s Love is strong, dynamic, and resilient. The Jesus who suffers in agony upon the cross is cauterising the wounds of sin and evil. The crucified God uncovers the deepest truth of the universe, what CS Lewis calls “the deep magic from the dawn of time”. It is the reason why the Book of Revelation (in Chapter 5.6, and throughout later chapters) chooses to put the symbol of “the lamb who is slain” on the heavenly throne at the very centre of the universe. It is why the Apostle Paul chooses to begin so many of his letters to the Churches with the greeting “Grace and Peace to you from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ” or a similar formula.

Grace is one of the greatest words of Scripture, a word to relish and to hang on to. Years ago, I was taught to see it, in English, as **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**, an acronym to remind me that in Jesus crucified, God is taking on himself all the sin of the world, and opening a way that we might be redeemed and become recipients of his intended blessing.

Love, grace *and* **compassion** – here is a trio of connected words which all witness to the relationship that we are called by Jesus to turn and embrace. I add Compassion to Love and Grace, for when we open our hearts to the presence of God in prayer or in sacrament, then his compassion towards us is what our spirit senses and experiences. “Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavily laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” Jesus says to us. (*Matthew 11.28,29*)

Here are three foundational words I give you therefore as we approach Lent: Love, Grace and Compassion. They characterise how God relates to us, and they also give us for our own lives values to live out, and to live up to. God’s merciful attitude towards us is beautifully expressed in the Welsh hymn “Dyma Gariad” by William Rees, which I commend to you as we celebrate St Valentine and move into Lent. Do look out the words of the hymn, in English or in Welsh, and reflect upon what they mean to you, and to your faith. They make a very good basis for prayer.

On the mount of crucifixion Fountains opened deep and wide
Through the floodgates of God's mercy Flowed a vast and gracious tide
Grace and love, like mighty rivers Poured incessant from above
And Heaven's peace and perfect justice Kissed a guilty world in love.

