

Sermon Sunday 10 February 2019: Growing up in love

**Bible Reading:** 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

We had this reading last week. I warned you we'd be talking about it two weeks running. As I said last week, the very long letter of 1 Corinthians can be summed up in two words – Grow up. Paul is writing to a church which is scrapping with itself, knocking their heads together, trying to teach them how to get on, pouring out love onto them and calling them to love each other first and foremost. His main point is that we can grow up, become more mature in how we relate to others, because God loves us and needs us and is alive in us. Grow up

So. I have a question for you this morning:

In your loving others, **what have you got better at as you have got older?**

Life demands more of us doesn't it. This week I have had to get better at letting go, as I put my middle son on a plane to Auckland. It confronted with me with how very much I love him and enjoy having him around, and now I miss him and I know I'll go on missing him ... but that's part of loving ha.

I wonder what you have got better at in your loving.

What in that list that Cecile just read out, from Paul, have you got better at? ... Love is patient, love is kind ...

**Discuss.**

*(older children come and talk with me?)*

Paul goes on from his list of what love looks like to these intriguing lines about growing up. When I was a child I thought like a child, I acted like a child. Now I am an adult I have put away child-like ways, he says.

Yeah I don't know if we ever really put away child-like ways, Paul. We don't actually stop being who we were when we were a baby, or a little kid ... Who I was when I was 5 is still part of me. But we learn new skills, we add to our kit bag of options for how to think and how to act. We learn more ways to love, hopefully, as we get older.

I have 3 ideas about this. 3 ways we learn and grow in love. You can count to 3 with me. First, it's not all about me

A baby is born the centre of the universe. Everything is about me. Everyone is purely there for me. Everyone is part of me.

As a baby becomes a toddler they learn that other people are other people. Other people have their own existence, and thoughts, and feelings. It's all a bit of a shock at first, because a baby also discovers that they are not always going to get their needs met exactly how and when they want. So there are is crying and yelling and hitting as a baby tries to get the universe to revolve around them. But it doesn't.

As we grow we become more able to love as we learn to take charge of getting our own needs met and so we are more able to look after other people. I can pull myself back and make space for you to be you. I can love and keep on loving even with someone hurts me, because I can look after my own needs. I can be genuinely curious about you when you are different from me, because my life is actually not all about me.

Second, we can act instead of react

A child is constantly responding to what is going on around them and inside of them. Am I safe? Is anyone looking after me? What's that? What does it taste like? Senses on overload, all the time. No wonder they need lots of sleep.

Teenagers also are highly tuned in to what is going on around them, very aware of shifting dynamics of who likes who or who has said what to whom.

The trick to growing up is to learn to act instead of react.

You figure out as an adult that blaming other people for your own actions is a hiding to nothing. It gets you nowhere. You learn as an adult, that other people say and do all manner of rubbish, but actually, surprise surprise, it does not have to get to me. It does not have to push me into reacting they way they want me to.

This astonishing skill is something we call integrity. Which means choosing for yourself how you want to live, and getting on and living that way, no matter what anyone else says or does.

All 11 things in Paul's list of how to love are like that. We can be patient and kind, respectful and honest, no matter what anyone else says or does. Loving is about acting with love, not reacting.

Third, we see ourselves more clearly

Paul describes growing up as looking at ourselves in a dirty mirror, at a dim reflection. We're always a bit of a puzzle to ourselves. As Paul writes elsewhere, he still got frustrated with himself, still did things he regretted and didn't fully understand his own reactions sometimes. Paul longs in these verses to fully know, as he is fully known. He longs for completeness, full clarity, and knows it's coming sometime, maybe not in this lifetime.

Growing up is seeing ourselves more clearly. Self awareness is key to loving others.

Mind you, we don't always like what we see. That's why in this church we include in our worship services a time of confession. It trains us week by week to see ourselves clearly, the good and the ugly, and to say 'sorry' and to know again that it's OK, we're OK because of a grace and mercy far bigger than us, so we can get on with loving again with a fresh start, over and over.

Seeing ourselves clearly helps us to love, because we glimpse just a little maybe, how God sees us, and that is with eyes of infinite love.

So. 3 big ideas about getting better at love as we grow up

First, it's not all about me

Second, we can act instead of react

Third, we see ourselves more clearly

Selflessness. Integrity. Self-awareness

*Discuss?*

Our second reading today is Jesus calling the first disciples. I'm not going to say much about it - after the reading we will go straight into our offering.

It is good at the start of each year to remember how faith begins – with God's call on our lives. So each year we read the stories of Jesus calling people to follow him. It's helpful also for our discussion about love, because those people who walked with Jesus down the dusty roads of Israel learned about how to love from watching him. They had that experience that Paul was longing for, of seeing face to face, and knowing themselves as fully known. Each person who responded to Jesus knew beyond all doubt that he loved them, and that released them to grow to maturity. So each of those disciples became someone far more extraordinary than they could ever have imagined, because they learned to love from the master of love. Jesus.

**Bible Reading:** Luke 5:1-11