

Guild Sunday Notes

This week we have been marking the 130th Anniversary of our Guild. As part of that, we have been reflecting on the themes of community, faith and love.

Some commentators have likened the early Acts community to the crater left by a meteorite, or the ripples that flow out from a stone dropped in water. The coming of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is not only some 'spiritual' event, but one with real, material, social effects. The prime example of this is the creation of the Church. When the Church is *truly* the Church - as opposed to some human institution or organisation - it is the new creation. It is a snapshot of what community *should* be, and one day *will* be. Yet the Church is only truly the Church when it is dependent upon God. The moment it believes and acts as if *it* is in control it begins to decay, along with the flashes of true love and true community that are the gifts of God to those who put their trust in him, and look to him as the source and provider of all that is good.

This brings us neatly to our reading from 1 John, and its famous declaration that 'God is love'. While other religions can speak of God's love, no faith is as clear and direct as ours that God *is* love. Yet as astonishing as this is, there are two dangers associated with it that we must be careful to avoid. The first is collapsing 'God' into 'love'. It is very common for folk to use John's declaration to say that *everything* that secular culture calls 'love' is approved of by God, or that every expression of human love is somehow divine. That is not what John means. Instead - and as he makes clear repeatedly in his letters and Gospel - to love as God loves means to love what he loves and avoid what he wants us to avoid. Without following God's Word, human love quickly loses its form, and decays into possessiveness, manipulation, exploitation and self and mutual harm. Second, John is insistent that one cannot have a relationship with the God of Love and not also love others. If we *truly* love God, and have *truly* had an experience of God's love, the love of God overflows from our life into the lives of others. This is the basis for mission, as well as the everyday kindness that brightens the world and sustains society. This is at the heart of what Jesus means when he calls us to be salt, light and yeast. Our love may be invisible, small, and sometimes looked down upon. Yet it makes all the difference, giving flavour, illumination, and growth to an otherwise dull, dark and lifeless world.

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

1. Have you ever had an experience of rich Christian community like this?
2. There are various things going on in this passage (teaching, prayer, fellowship, practical service, worship and early form of communion/Eucharist etc). What do you think the connection is between them all? Are some more important than others? Illustrate this or draw a diagram if it is helpful

1 John 4:7-12

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

3. What do you think it means for God to be 'love'?
4. Where do people look for love in our society?
5. John makes a connection between knowing God's love and loving other people. How would you describe this connection?
6. Activity: we're going to draw a tree! First draw the roots of the tree. These are the sources of love in your life. Write on or next to them where you get love from (try to think as widely as possible). Second, draw the trunk and branches of the tree. This represents how this love makes you the person you are. Write on or next to the trunk character traits that have been shaped by the love of others. Finally, draw fruit on the branches. This represents the way in which you share love in practical ways. How do you show love to other people? Take some time at the end to pray over what you have drawn and written