

**Good Morning.**

**Before I begin, as this is the last regular choir service under Ben, I want to say how much we in the choir have enjoyed his leadership and the music he has shared with us. We congratulate Ben on being accepted into Julliard, one of the most prestigious Schools of Music. It has been a delight to sing under Ben's direction and we will miss him.**

**Let's pray:**

**Dear Lord, sanctify us in your Word—which is the truth. Amen**

**This morning, I am eager to share some thoughts regarding God's amazing love and the implications of that love: His love in the creation of all that we know; His love in revealing Himself to us His creatures; and His love in bringing us back from our rejection of His love.**

**I'll start with a personal reflection to illustrate my topic:**

**I grew up in East Kildonan in an Anglican family and we went to church weekly.**

**I learned that there is such a thing as SIN and also that I seemed to be pretty good at it. I also realized that this was not good in terms of eternity. But I did not know that there is a remedy. I don't recall any mention in church of such things as salvation, or God's forgiveness: It may have been presented and I missed it.**

**When I was 15, my family moved from a tiny bungalow on Munroe Avenue to a larger house on Chestnut Street to accommodate my grandparents. Chestnut was 2 blocks from St. Margaret's Church. Canon Glover preached from the Bible and almost always mentioned God's love. He was going through John's Gospel and when he got to the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, he emphasized the amazing verse 16: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" Canon Glover asked the congregation to insert one's own name in place of "world" and "whoever" and repeat the sentence.**

God so loved Bob, that He gave His only begotten son that if Bob believes in Him he should not perish but have everlasting life. This was a revelation: there was hope for forgiveness. I struggled for some months because I was afraid that if I accepted Jesus as my savior He was also to be my Lord—the one in charge of my life. I was afraid that He might mess up my life or make it too uncomfortable. Eventually, I finally said: “OK Lord you can have my life. That was the beginning of the most amazing relationship and I experienced an overwhelming joy. God is love and He loves even me.

This new relationship brought me into life experiences I could never have imagined for myself. For example He made clear to me that I was to serve Him as a missionary surgeon in Pakistan: One of the most satisfying periods of my life. And His adventures continue.

OK—enough of me:

God declared to the Hebrews through Jeremiah: “I have loved you with an everlasting love”. The Psalm we read declares: “His steadfast love endures for ever.” (Ps. 118)

Humans have discovered amazing things about of the **What** of the structure of the universe and of the wonders of human life. But our discoveries don’t tell us the **WHY** of this amazing cosmos and the miracle of life.

and we ask **WHY?**

A Gospel-centred Church response to the question “why is there something rather than nothing?” is God’s **LOVE**.

He made all this and said “it is good”. Our Psalm today says: “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; his love endures forever”. God loves the universe He made. And we are the beneficiaries of this loving creation.

From the prophets to the apostles, God makes clear that we can begin to understand the nature of God’s love by experiencing His creation: in Psalm 19 we read: “the heavens declare the glory of

God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands”. The Apostle Paul wrote...”since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made”

We respond in worship with: **“We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

We can go further in trying to understand what is behind all that exists, as we read the profound statement in John’s first letter: **“God is love”. (1 Jn. 4:8)**

His law for us is to love: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”** It is not possible to avoid the conclusion that God has created all that exists out of love and to bring love into all that He has created—above all, we human beings.

So God has revealed His love in the creation of the Cosmos and of life. Even more He reveals His love in His redeeming of lost humanity. 8 Centuries before Christ, Isaiah wrote:

**“All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned each one to our own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”**

And there is an amazing truth revealed through the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Roman church:

**“But God commends his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us”.**

So from the Scriptures we learn two vital truths: We are wayward sinners; and Christ died for so that we might be forgiven.

That is why we pray the confession in Morning Prayer.

**“almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against**

thy holy laws, we have left undone what we ought to have done and done what we ought not to have done and there is no health in us...”

What is astounding about all this is the cost to God of His love: Jesus the Christ died for us. The Son of God laid aside His crown, was born as a human baby in a stable, lived a simple life, performed miraculous signs and proclaimed God’s love and His own Messiahship. Then he was brutally humiliated, abandoned and viciously tortured to death in the most cruel method devised by cruel mankind, by the very creatures He created in love and for love. **Why did this have to happen? Have you ever wondered why Jesus died on the cross—could God not forgive us without that? I used to wonder about this.**

God has shared with us the reason Jesus had to die.

We heard from the reading in Romans ch. 3 the following words: **“... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith....He did this to demonstrate his justice, he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”**

Why does God want to demonstrate his justice?

To whom does He demonstrate His justice?

Would God have been unjust to forgive without the cross?

Last month, Madeline and I read through the Revelation given to the Apostle John on Patmos.

As you know it is an amazing account of remarkable visions and messages. Internet games must seem tame compared to John’s descriptions—with vicious plagues, and with monsters rising from the sea with morphing horns. There is also ethereal beauty of worship around the throne of God. But the passage in Revelation read this morning gives us an amazing glimpse into a colossal

struggle that helps to explain the lengths to which God in Christ was determined to go because of His love for us wayward humans.

Not only have we said NO to the Eternal YES, but we are condemned by the Accuser, the Satan, who, we read, “accuses them day and night before our God.” Let me read the pertinent passage: “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God”. Rev.12:9-10.

The accusation is **just**. We humans are guilty.

The Satan goes on and on that we humans do not deserve to be forgiven and must not be forgiven. And Satan’s accusation is that God is not righteous nor just if He dares to forgive guilty humanity.

Let me present a simple analogy here regarding the cost of forgiveness: If I were to throw a rock through that beautiful east window what would happen? the rain would come in and snow would come in and worse it would fall on the choir. Besides there would be an ugly distortion and gap. There is a repulsive deformity in the universe of St. Aidan’s Church. The Vestry gets a quote on the cost of repair and tells me I must pay some huge amount that I can’t possibly afford. I plead and plead and the church in its mercy decides to forgive me. So all is well, right? NO--the deformity remains, the rain and snow come in causing more damage and discomfort. Something must be done and something will be done. But who will pay for restoring the integrity of the church? The church forgave me, so I don’t have to pay. **So who pays?, the church must pay, right? The principle is this, the one who forgives must pay the cost of what is forgiven.**

The Satan accuses the world of sin worthy of separation from God and simultaneously accuses God of injustice if He should dare to forgive us. But God is love and He does forgive and He does pay the cost of the forgiveness: If we read again the passage from Romans 3:23-26, notice, “that He may be just AND the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

God remains just while also forgiving the rebels who said NO—because He paid the price of the forgiveness. God’s love has brought this about with the eternal Son on the human cross. This is why Jesus died for our sins. At the cross LOVE and JUSTICE meet and we are free of all condemnation.

What wondrous love is this!

We can rest in the assurance of His forgiveness and LOVE.

So, How may we, His creatures, respond to God’s amazing love? We ask for God’s forgiveness. “if we confess our sins, He is faithful, and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 Jn. 1:9

This forgiveness is a free gift offered to all who come to God in faith, confessing our need of forgiveness and acknowledging Jesus as Lord of our life. Why does it seem so hard to accept this gift? God offers forgiveness and eternal salvation. He leaves it to us to accept His offering.

If we receive the gift of forgiveness and the accompanying new life in Christ, we submit to our loving God as the Lord of our life—He is to now in charge. With that, we have the privilege to offer Him our praises. And we love in response: We are able to fulfill the ancient law: “To love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.” May we eagerly seek to love God and to love one another.

I'll finish this overview of God's amazing story of love by quoting again "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life"

Have we accepted God's forgiveness?  
Or is the window still broken?

In our Gospel reading Jesus prays that His followers be ONE. When we speak to one another, may it be with love? When we speak of one another, let it be with love?

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your love that created our world,  
thank you that you brought Jesus into our world.  
thank you for the cross.

Forgive us for our lack of love and help us to learn to Love you and to love one another as Christ has loved us.

*If you would like to discuss what I have tried to share, don't hesitate to talk with the Rev. Kim or Susan Salo or with me after the service.*

*Chris Barnes reminds us that There is a table in the narthex with magazines laid out (Horizon's, TEAM, Voice of Martyrs etc). for your interest. Please have a look.*