



Dear Friends,

A highlight in my week is sharing a meal with our growth group. We start eating at 6:30PM. I love the hour spent talking and eating with one another around the dinner table before Bible study. We discuss what is going on in our lives. We talk about our workdays. We reveal what foods we like and don't like, as we serve ourselves from the various dishes on offer that people bring to share.

Last weekend at the church working bee, I was talking to a fellow Christian as we dug holes for new plants in the manse front yard. The topic of discussion was music. I discovered that we like many bands and artists in common. He also spoke of bands I have never heard of before. I learnt something new about my Christian brother. I liked knowing we share a common interest.

Why am I telling you these things? Because both stories are about loving others.

Loving others has been on my mind this week for two reasons. The first is, I have just finished preparing this Sunday's sermon from Matthew 5:17-48. In that passage, Jesus calls his followers to a greater righteousness. His demands to practice a greater righteousness all centre on the command to love our neighbour. Jesus' teaching climaxes with a call to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute you (5:44). It's a love impossible to practice without Jesus.

The second reason is that I recently read an article by David Brooks about love.

Brooks states that one of the most important questions you can ask someone is, "What are you loving right now?" That's because "we all need energy sources to power us through life, and love is the most powerful energy source known to humans."

The motivation for Brooks writing what he called "this little homage to love" is "because Americans seem to be having less of it." He observes that marriage rates hover at near record lows, people are having fewer kids, they have fewer friends than before and spend less time with friends they have. He comments:

In 2023 a Wall Street Journal/NORC survey asked people about what values were "very important" to them. Since 1998, the shares of Americans who said they highly valued patriotism, religion, having children & community involvement have all plummeted. The only value Americans came to care more about, the survey found, was making money.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment in the Law is, he responded:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' (Mt 22:37-39)

The most powerful energy source known to humans is the love of God in Christ Jesus.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:10-11)

Being loved by God motivates me to love others. God's love for me is one of the main reasons I value being at church and interacting with my church family. Love for others is expressed just by turning up. To simply be there. Love is also expressed by all those seemingly minor interactions we have with each other, whether it's chatting about the sermon over morning tea, talking about your favourite podcast at church lunch, or swapping notes about your favourite bands and the last live gig you saw at a church working bee. This is all the stuff of friendships and relationships.

God Bless,
Mark Adams