

Rev Tim Perkins  
Sept 9<sup>th</sup> 2020

**“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3: 16)**

Dear Friends,

I want to return today to the three aspects that Dallas Willard believes lead us to an experience of “life without lack”: faith, death to self and agape love. In my previous letters I have written about how faith draws us nearer to God and positions us to receive God’s good blessings. I have suggested that it is when we are able to die to ourself that we then become willing vessels for God to work in and through. Today, I want to suggest that once we are open fully to the goodness of God, God’s special type of love ‘agape love’ flows into us like a river and then out into a desperately thirsty world, drawing others into an experience of faith in a loving God.

Before I write another word, I want to encourage you to put this letter down, turn to your Bible and read some or all of the following passages:

Luke 6: 27 – 38, John 13: 31 – 35, Romans 12: 9 – 10, Romans 13: 8 – 10, 1 John 4: 11 – 21, and 1 Corinthians 13: 4 – 7.

Take some time to read them slowly, asking God to open your mind to receive these words as a gift that God is ready to give you. Let them become a vision of what your life in Christ is becoming because, after all, God is love. As Willard says, “that is not an explanation of who God is; that’s an explanation of what love is. God wants to give himself to you so you can more joyfully and freely give yourself and God’s love to others.”<sup>1</sup>

So pause for a moment to spend some time with those passages of Scripture...

Love is a gift to us from God. Willard says, “We can seek a gift and we can receive a gift, but we do not perform for a gift..”<sup>2</sup> So when we read passages of Scripture such as those listed above, “we must remember that the call to us is not to *do* as much as it is to *receive*.”<sup>3</sup> We can only love God because God has first loved us. This is why the preaching and sharing of the Christian Gospel of love is essential, and why there is no task on earth as essential as teaching and sharing the love of God for all people plainly! That is why I started this letter with the famous words from John 3: 16: “For God so *loved* the world...”

One of the main accusations faced by Jesus during his earthly ministry was that he received sinners. He talked with people of ill-repute. He welcomed them into his company. He even ate in their homes. This is vital for us to see because Jesus is the expression of the love of God for us, and in him we see the many ways God deals with people in mercy and grace. “Jesus delighted in every individual; so, too, with us. He focused on what was of value in them; so, too, with us. He related to them, he associated with them, he got right down where they were and served them. So, too, with us; he meets us where we are, wherever we are. The darkest valley doesn’t frighten him away.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Willard D, *Life without lack*, Nelson Books 2018, P. 159

<sup>2</sup> Op Cit, P. 163

<sup>3</sup> Op Cit. P. 163 -164.

<sup>4</sup> Op Cit. P. 164.

Near the beginning of his ministry, when Jesus called his first disciples, we find this phrase used in Mk. 3: 13, "He called to Him those He Himself wanted." This is the love of God in action. Jesus called them because he wanted them, so that they might be with him. Yes, he then went on to give them a mission to carry the love of God out into the world. But first he wanted them to be with him because he delighted in them. As they spent time in his presence, his love began to rub off on them and transform them from the inside out so that when they went out into the world they did so not to love people but to be loving people! Jesus' love became their love. The way Jesus related to the world became the way that they related to the world. They didn't have to try to muster up as much love as possible to express to the difficult people they met. They had rather become people whose characters were marked by love. They didn't have to try, it just flowed from them.

"Most people know that love is not just about the things we do. Love is an attitude of the heart. We know we can *act* in a loving way without really loving. (Obligation, obedience, reputation, or personal benefit may be our motive.) We sense and appreciate when things are done for us because someone truly loves us... We should not try to love that person; we should train to become the kind of person who would love them. Only then can the ideal of love pass into a real possibility and practise. Our aim under love is not to be loving to this or that person, or in this or that kind of situation, but to be a person possessed by love as an overall character of life. Our responses to the specific occasions when we are to act flow out of our overall character. I do not come to my enemies and try to love them; I come to them as a loving person. The good tree bearing good fruit."<sup>5</sup>

So how do I become a more loving person? I would suggest that it is actually fairly straightforward, though far from easy. To become a person whose character is defined by the love of God we have to meditate upon the life and ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Bible, we have to pray for the Holy Spirit to cause Her fruit to grow in our lives (The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...Gal. 5: 26) and then we have to put the teachings of Jesus into practise in our daily lives. We have to just do it! And the best way of doing it is to serve other people. To serve someone is the first step towards loving them and it is something that we can all do. It enables us to grow in our ability to relate to others.

Serving others is of course the great example of the love of God that Jesus places before us, both at the last supper when he, the Master, got down from the table and washed the feet of his students, but also in its fullness when he laid down his life for his friends at the cross. Jesus died for you because he loves you. He was not forced to die for you. He freely chose to die for you because he loves you. He has chosen you for Himself because He wants you to be in His company. He delights in you. From the depth of that relationship the love of God flows into you, and through you, out into the world, through acts of loving-kindness, compassion and mercy.

When we are willing to trust God, to place our lives in his hands, and to allow his love to transform us, then we neither lack anything nor need fear anything.

Every Blessing,

Rev Tim

## Notices

### Circuit Service

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<sup>5</sup> Op Cit. 165.

I am delighted to say that this Sunday (13<sup>th</sup>) we shall be holding our first Circuit Service since February! It will take place via the Zoom platform at 6pm and will be led by Rev Roger Smith and Deacon Jenny Parnell. It will be an opportunity for us to engage in worship together and to begin to reconnect relationships with folk from across the whole Circuit. Please use the following details if you would like to join in the service:

## **HOW TO TAKE PART**

If you're using a laptop, tablet or smartphone:

- ✓ open the 'Zoom Cloud Meetings' app and enter meeting ID: 986 3972 2958
- ✓ or click on the meeting link: <https://zoom.us/j/98639722958>

If you don't have access to the internet:

- ✓ use your landline to join in by phoning 0131 460 1196 and enter meeting ID (as above)

## **Circuit Meeting**

Our Circuit Meeting takes place on Wed 16<sup>th</sup> Sept at 7.30pm via Zoom. Members of the Circuit Meeting should have the link to participate separately. Please hold our meeting in your thoughts and prayers as we continue to navigate discerning the way forward for our Circuit and its constituent churches.

## **Use of Church Buildings for Worship and Other activities**

You may have heard the latest announcement from the Government about social gatherings being limited to 6 people indoors or outdoors from Monday. We understand that churches are exempt from this guidance as we are working on the basis of households sitting socially-distanced from others anyway. Weddings and funerals will still be allowed subject to a maximum attendance figure of 30.