**Based on Romans 12:9-21**

**How do we love?**

During this period of Covid-19 we have considered the subject of love one or two times in the readings and reflections. Today the first 4 words from Paul’s letter to the church in Rome (Chapter 12 v 9) is **Let love be genuine.**

Sometimes it is hard to love; yet we are called to love. To love through all circumstances.

I have witnessed acts of love and generosity during this time of isolation and lockdown and we have cared for each other. Yet I have also witnessed little niggles of past fractious relationships coming through in responses on social media.

Can we genuinely love one another – even if we do not agree on everything. Do we vie for top position, or do we capitulate sometimes reflecting on the love we should hold?

***Love must be genuine*.** I am sure some of you know that in the Greek (which this part of the Bible was written in) there were four words for love—agape, philos, eros, and storge. Our one word for love is often inadequate. Agape is a high form of love, often used to describe God’s love for people. Paul is using it here to describe what our love for each other and our God, our God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit should be. Adding this we can bring the Greek for genuine /sincere: which is —be not hypocritical.

Other Bible translations hold these meanings

Do not just pretend to love others. Really love them.

Let love be sincere.

Let love be without hypocrisy.

Be not deceitful in your love,

Let your love be perfectly sincere.

Genuine agape is love without a selfish agenda—love that seeks what is good for the one we love. Much of what the world calls love is self-serving. What can I get out of it, it may not be a conscious thought but if we are honest it is there. *Consider how much romantic love is concerned with fulfilling one’s personal needs.*

Paul lists love first among the thirteen desired behaviours, and love is more than first among equals. God is love, Jesus said in John 13:34-35 – 34 “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Love sets the tone, and the other dozen desired behaviours grow out of love, they are natural expressions of love.

Paul is making this point because we learn from an early age how to pretend we care for someone, when we actually do not. For example:

We can speak well of someone when they are present, but when we leave we criticise them.

We say: “no child should go hungry”, yet we do not donate to the food bank or another such cause. We do not love the refugee; we do not seek out their story where love has been lost.

We smile at someone while they are talking, but we really are not listening.

So, we need to start again – whatever our age: as we receive and give love.

Jesus said (John 3:16) *For 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. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.*

God is love, God’s primary nature is to love as shown by His continuing creation, His rescue plan for us through His Son Jesus Christ. The cross of Jesus is the greatest demonstration of God’s love for us.

God’s saving work of grace in the heart of the sinner and those who turn back to him, is the true source of love. God sent his Holy Spirit to us to transform us and make us new in love.

The Apostle John wrote (1 John 3:1) See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

I add the words of Leo Tolstoy in War and Peace: (the words of André after being wounded in battle)

“Yes, love, ...but not the love that loves for something, to gain something, or because of something, but that love that I felt for the first time, when dying, I saw my enemy and yet loved him. I knew that feeling of love which is the essence of the soul, for which no object is needed. And I know that blissful feeling now too. To love one's neighbours; to love one's enemies. To love everything - to Love God in all His manifestations. Someone dear to one can be loved with human love; but an enemy can only be loved with divine love. And that was why I felt such joy when I felt that I loved that man. What happened to him? Is he alive? ...Loving with human love, one may pass from love to hatred; but divine love cannot change. Nothing, not even death, can shatter it.

We can receive and give that divine love – agape – the highest form of love.

Let me encourage you to read and re-read the words Paul wrote to the Church Rome (as below) they are wonderful words to live by. Amen

**Romans 12:9-21**

Love in action

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

 if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.