

11th May, 2014

Reading: Psalm 100

Sermon: Love Story

When I started thinking about today's sermon and read the various suggested Scripture Readings, my thought was 'Where do I begin?' and that triggered the memory of a song which all of you will know. Because of that, I'm going to begin today with a short video clip of that song but as you listen to it, I need you to do something. Every time you see and hear the word 'she' I want you to substitute 'He' because in many ways this song is a perfect portrayal of God and of our relationship with God and it portrays it, I think, as well as any of the Psalms although it clearly wasn't written about God. Just listen to the words or sing along, if you like, but if you sing along, please use 'He' instead of 'She'.

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6w0cy_1HY4 Andy Williams:
Love Story)

The words are so powerful.

When He said that first hello, when God spoke to us for the first time, be it through Scripture, through nature, through a song or a hymn, when God made that initial contact, the song says: He gave meaning to this empty world of mine.

He fills my heart with so much love that anywhere I go, I'm never lonely. Is that our experience of God because that is the power of Love. It fills our hearts.

I reach for His hand, it's always there. He is dependable. He is there to comfort, to walk with us, to encourage us when the going gets tough, to calm us and strengthen us simply by putting our hand in His and knowing He is there. That is the power of love.

I know I'll need Him till the stars all burn away and He'll be there. He is trustworthy and as Psalm 23 says: **I nothing lack if I am His and He is mine forever.** In Him is our fulfilment. Such is the power of love.

What a song of praise and what a powerful description of love, of a love which is eternal and of a love which is rooted in someone whom we trust implicitly and whom we know will never let us down.

I know 'Love Story' was written for a different context but when we substitute 'He' for 'She' that song takes on a whole new meaning.

Now, when we come to Psalm 100, we see the Psalmist's description of God and our relationship with Him and like 'Love Story', all of it is centred on

Love. Psalm 100 is centred on the love of God which the Psalmist says 'endures forever'.

Everything he says is based on that love. His call to all the earth to worship our Creator is based on that love.

It is he who made us, he says, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

In those words, there is such a strong sense of belonging, as there is in 'Love Story'. Love holds the young couple together. They belong together and we belong to God. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture. We have an even greater need of God because He is the one who feeds us, who nurtures us, who cares for us, who protects us as a Shepherd does His sheep.

The Psalmist calls us to worship our Creator, to recognise that He is indeed God, to realise all that He is and with that knowledge he says: **Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.**

That is not always something which is reflected in our worship or indeed on our faces because the expression of joy is not just meant to be reflected in the words that we use. The words that we use in our praise are meant to be a reflection of what is in our hearts.

Think of a couple of the hymns of praise which we have sung today so far. It was at this point in the sermon that I realised the first hymn I had chosen was our Scripture Reading! Fortuitous, I think, because the same call to worship was issued at the beginning of our service. The same message was given.

Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice,
Him serve with mirth, his praise foretell.
Come ye before him and rejoice.
Enter his gates with praise.
Approach his courts with joy.

And then there was Psalm 23: **The Lord is my Shepherd, I'll not want.** It was also an acknowledgment of who God is, and like Psalm 100, an acknowledgement that we are His and indeed that He is our Shepherd, that He is our Leader. That same message of belonging together is brought home again.

Two people who love each other cannot imagine being separated. Two people in love cannot imagine living without one another. The separation, when it comes, is what tears all of us apart. It's perhaps no coincidence that tears is spelled the same way as tears because the pain of losing that sense of belonging, of losing the security of love, of losing that sense that the other is always there, that is what causes the tears and what tears us apart.

The reassurance in Psalm 100 is that God's love endures forever. His faithfulness continues through all generations and that is the reason for our praise and our worship. We are His people, a people whose relationship is founded on eternal love and in a Creator who will never let us down.