

All You Need is Love – Part 1

by Rev. Robert Griffith

Where were you 50 years ago – in 1967? It was the year our Prime Minister went for a swim at Cheviot beach and disappeared forever; it was the year of the infamous Six Day War between Arab forces and Israel; it was the year of massive protests which pressured Governments to pull out of the Vietnam war; it was the year China tested its first hydrogen bomb and the year Mohammed Ali was stripped of his world heavyweight boxing title for refusing to enlist in the army. But in the midst of all that turbulence, war, international tension and fear, a man by the name of John Lennon wrote a song. He wrote many songs that year, but one in particular became legendary. The powerful thing about this song is it can't be misinterpreted. It can't be twisted to mean something else. It contains a crystal clear message to every person on earth, regardless of age, gender, race, or background. The Beatles released this song in July 1967 and it went straight to number one right across the world and stayed there for very long time. Over the next 50 years, this song would be played hundreds of millions of times and today it is one of the most iconic songs of all time.

Given the title of this sermon, you may have already guessed the song is '*All You Need is Love*.' This song was very economic with words – it was like a slogan set to music. Basically it contains the same repeated word 'love' seventy three times and the mantra, "*All you need is love*" or "*Love is all your need*" fifty times! Toss in a few bridging words, a catchy tune and you have one of the simplest, yet most penetrating and influential songs in all of human history. Why is that?

Well I think this song became an instant hit in the 1960's and an iconic song ever since, because it touched something in the core of humanity. I doubt that John Lennon really knew this at the time, but I believe it resonated with the image of God in people. It affirmed what sub-consciously every last human on this planet already knows instinctively and that is: **Love lies at the core of who we are, why we were created and our very nature as human beings.** When I hear this song I am also reminded just how central love is to the mission of Christ, the purpose of the Church, the foundation of life and the nature of humanity.

So I am borrowing this song's title for a series of teaching which I am commencing today and which will run for some time. It's a simple title for a sermon series, but a somewhat provocative one because some of you might suggest that love is not all we need. Well I guess that depends on how we understand love and therein lies the challenge for me over the coming weeks as I examine the Scriptures, our human experience and the heart of God - to see if love is truly all we need. But where do we start with such a huge topic as 'love'? Well, according to Maria in *The Sound of Music* we 'start at the very beginning, a very good place to start!' So let's go back to Genesis as we begin this new series on the priority and foundation of love.

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die. The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:15-18)

Now let me point out one thing here first, and if you get nothing else from this sermon except this one insight - it will have been worth my time and yours. God created the world and He said it was good.

He created this lush garden full of trees bearing fruit, full of all kinds of experiences – sensual, physical and intellectual. He said to this new human He created (and I paraphrase here), *“You can freely eat from the lavish provision of this garden. You are to enjoy life to its fullest. But, in the very centre of the garden, in the very centre of your life, there will be a constant source of frustration for you.”* That’s right, in this ‘good’ garden, before the fall, before sin entered the human world, God said *“Here is something right under your nose every day that you can't experience and you can't know, but will always want to.”* That is to say, God built into our earthly lives from the very beginning an element of frustration that He did not intend for us to overcome. Now just let that sink in for a moment.

You see it's not sin that accounts for *all* of our frustration. It's not sin that is totally responsible for all our limitations. It is not the fall of man that has given us all of our boundaries. *God* has given us some. In His good pleasure, in His sovereignty - *God* has limited us and assigned us frustration to some degree on some level in this life. God is the only One without limits; the only One without any frustrations; the only One Who is totally fulfilled.

So when you hear pop psychology saying to you: *‘Sign up for my program and you'll be fulfilled..’* or when you hear the army recruiter say: *‘Sign up and you'll be all that you can be ..’* or when you hear religion say: *‘Follow these ten easy steps and you will reach your highest potential in God ..’* - you are being lied to. How do you know it’s a lie? Because in this life, frustration, limitation and a permanent sense of *‘not yet’* has been designed into our human, earthly experience by God. A lot of people end up feeling guilt and shame because of this frustration and this lack of fulfilment. I have met people like this almost every day of my life and even more so in Christian ministry. When we are frustrated, when we lack fulfilment in some area, when things aren't going as well as they could be or should be, in our opinion, frustration can often develop into a personal sense of guilt or shame and there are preachers and well-meaning Christian brothers and sisters out there who will fan that flame of guilt and shame by suggesting our lack of fulfilment is all *our* fault because of our lack of faith or because of our sin or something we are doing wrong or not doing right.

Of course, a lot of our frustration may well be the result of our own bad choices; some of it may well be the result of sin - ours or somebody else’s - but a lot of it is actually designed into life by God. God never intended that we would be totally free from frustration in this life. We are pilgrims on a journey and only when we reach our final eternal destination will we be completely free from this frustrating *‘not yet’* reality – but even then I am not so sure. I think we will spend eternity getting to know God better and deeper and closer. So I think this sense of *‘not yet’* and this sense of *‘there must be more’* is part of life and eternal life.

So if anyone promises you complete fulfilment inside or outside the Church - don't believe it. The Bible doesn't promise you that. God doesn't promise you that. In fact, God promises you a certain amount of *‘not yet’*, a certain amount of frustration and longing for completion in this life and He actually says that is *good*. He created the world that way and when He had finished He said *“This is good. This is the way it ought to be.”* Ok, let’s leave that digression and get back to the main point. Today I want us to pay attention to the second thing that God said here.

“The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18)

Now I know that this is one of the most quoted Bible passages at weddings and I am sure that 99% of sermons ever preached on these verses in Genesis are talking about the marriage relationship. That’s fine. Of course these verses are relevant to marriage. However, today’s sermon falls into the 1%. Which means I want to explore the foundational principle in these verses and not the specific application of that principle to marriage. Of course it applies to marriage, but not *only* to marriage.

The underlying principle articulated here applies equally to all humanity because none of us are meant to be alone. So while frustration is given to us as part of the human experience by God; while limitations are imposed on us; while there are some things that we long for that will not be given to us fully in this life; and that's the way it's supposed to be; there is one frustration that we are not supposed to endure. **We are not supposed to be alone** and we are not supposed to feel alone.

This is one frustration that God never intended us to live with – not ever. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the vast majority of what God has said and done throughout our whole human history is focused on ensuring that we never again have to endure the emptiness, frustration and debilitating darkness of being alone. God planned from the beginning for us to have helpers who are 'suitable' for us, which literally means 'comparable to' us and 'compatible with' us. People whom we can love and from whom we can receive love. **We were created to love and be loved.** I am not talking about marriage here. Not all people will be married and God is fine with that – but all people are meant to be in relationships, in community, in the family of humanity and ultimately the family of God. Nobody is meant to be alone.

So beware when you hear someone say, and it's often to a woman who is on her own, *"Well, the Lord will be your companion and He will be everything to you that you need and desire."* At times single men cop the same line, but not as often. Now I'm not sure where that idea comes from - but it doesn't come from the Bible. We just read it in Genesis 2:18 - God looked at a human being and said: *"Even I am not enough..."* According to God we were intended to love and be loved by flesh and blood human beings. To have helpers, to have companions, to have people to be affectionate towards and from whom we can receive affection. *That* is part of the stuff we are made of and it's essential to our being. There is a longing and a yearning for relationship and community that God built into us and one which God intended would be fulfilled in us during our earthly journey.

Why is this? Well it actually flows from Who God is. We are created in God's image and the New Testament tells us that *God is love*. God is not love in the abstract. God is not love in some moral, symbolic way. God *is* love in His essence. God *is* love in relationship - because that's what love refers to - it refers to relationships and *relationships* is the single dominant theme of the entire Bible. God the Father is the Father of somebody - that's a relationship. God the Son is the son of somebody - that's a relationship. God the Holy Spirit is the helper, the comforter, the counsellor - those are all relationship terms. God is a family man, if you want to put it that way, and when God created us, that family circle was expanded. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were in relationship or 'community' from the beginning - that's essential to who God is. And they said: *"... let us make mankind in our image. Let's expand the family."*

Well-adjusted families often want to do that, don't they? They want to expand their circle. That desire comes from the image and the heart of God. A well-adjusted, healthy Church doesn't want a nice little tight community for itself - it wants to expand and embrace many more who are on the outside. That desire comes from the image and heart of God. So now that we are in relationship to God through the saving life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is not just our Creator and our Source, God is our Father. Through the work of Jesus Christ – we now understand that God is Father to us - we are His children. God the Son is our Saviour and our shepherd but also our brother. God the Holy Spirit is our comforter, counsellor, advocate, interpreter and guide, but also our companion and friend.

A lot of people are thrashing around looking for meaning and some kind of reason for living, well I have the answer right here. I want to suggest that for you and me and for everyone else in this world, our reason for being created, is to be people who love and are loved. People who receive love from God and from other people and who give love to God and to other people.

That, I believe is the most important part of being human - and everything else that you do, professionally or otherwise is just the foreground detail on the broad canvas of life. I truly believe that our primary purpose, when boiled right down, is to receive and to give love and that's why everyone can be a huge success in life regardless of age, race, gender, intellect, physical ability or status. We are all given the opportunity to receive love and to extend love to others and from my experience over the years, I can promise you that if you sincerely connect with what I am praying God will reveal to us over the coming weeks in this teaching series, and take the time to re-visit the messages online and catch up with the sermons you miss – then God can and will re-vitalise, re-new, revive, restore and re-focus your entire life and bring clarity and power to your ministry in the Kingdom of God.

In fact, I will go even further out on the limb here and say that 'all you need is love' applies more to the Church of Jesus Christ than anywhere else in all creation. The Church is in crisis across our nation and throughout the western world. Rev. David Brown was telling me this week that when he was in Scotland recently he saw 'For Sale' signs on a number of Church buildings as congregations are literally dying every week across Britain. Hundreds of thousands of hours have been poured into Church growth conferences, books, courses, training programs, evangelism initiatives and strategies to 'fix' the Church. There have been a nauseating number of task forces, committees and councils convened to discuss the problem and the result is always the same: precious oxygen and time are consumed as we knock down another thousand trees to produce the paper on which our strategic plans and vision statements are printed and then filed in a drawer somewhere! Year after year after decade after decade ... we continue to excel at complicating what is so simple when really, all you need is love! John Lennon sang it, but long before that, God said it ... many times over. In 1 John 4 we are told so clearly:

"If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us ... In this world we are like Jesus ... We love because he first loved us."

Jesus made it even clearer when He told us to, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind .. and ... love your neighbour as yourself."* (Matthew 22:37-39). Receiving love from God and returning that love to God and to those around us – it's all about relationships and for all healthy, growing relationships, all you need is love – God's love – which *"has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit ..."* (Romans 5:4)

The Church is in crisis, because our personal relationships with God and with each other are in crisis. We don't truly know God, personally and intimately and we don't truly know each other. We share buildings, meetings, services, activities, programs and events - but we don't really share our hearts and lives. We don't really share love, intimacy, transparency and the kind of relationships which are the building blocks of a healthy Church. Jesus said, *"I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."* (Matthew 16:18) and in order to do that He has to overturn the tables in our temples – in our hearts – and drive out anything which prevents us from entering into the holy of holies – the heart of God. For only there, will we *"know this love that surpasses knowledge ... and be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* (Ephesians 3:19).

That's what's coming friends, if you stick around here and engage with this teaching. Jesus is reclaiming the Church which bears His name and that means He wants to reclaim our hearts, our worship, our devotion and our primary focus. Then, and only then, will we see Jesus truly building His Church – right here in our midst. Let those who have ears to hear ... listen to what the Spirit of God is saying to us today.