

SERMON: Sunday – 19 December 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper

The Disarming Love of God

Micah 5:2-5a

Luke 1:39-55

The prophet Micah speaks of one coming forth from out of one of the smallest clans of Judah to rule Israel, whose origin is from of old, from the ancient of days, the Source of all peace.

O how the world needs to recognise such a Source today, as much as any day that has gone before.

I was struck this week that what matters is that we humans recognise our need for connection with this Great Source of peace, who is the embodiment of Infinite Love.

Two writings struck me.

The first is from,

Greek Orthodox author Frederica Mathewes-Green describes the practice of the Jesus Prayer, which is the simple repetition of the phrase: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” She writes:

(SLIDE)

“God doesn’t need [reminders from us] to be merciful; [God] is merciful all the time, even when we don’t ask. But unless we make a habit of asking for mercy, we forget that we need it. . . .”

(Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer: The Ancient Desert Prayer That Tunes the Heart to God* (Paraclete Press: 2009))

That is so true. When we get out of the habit of seeking God we quickly forget that we need the connection with God, the Source of peace, love and joy.

Augustine famously said that our hearts will never rest until they are at rest in God.

Which is similar to the second quote I was struck by this week.

Saint John of the Cross was a 16th Century Christian mystic who spent a lot of his life in a monastic setting. Many in the Reformed tradition of church would have missed what people like John of the Cross said since he and others were actively engaged in the counter reformation.

(SLIDE)

But he spoke of the fact that the Architect of our hearts has wired us in such a way that nothing less than union with Infinite Love will satisfy.

He argued that most, or all, of us are addicts, we are addicted to something. And these addictions are addictions to finite things, things that won't last forever, which is why we need to keep coming back to our addiction. They never truly satisfy.

Which is why he is able to say that nothing less than union with Infinite Love will satisfy our hearts longing.

Even in the midst of darkness, turmoil, anxiety, pandemic, our hearts are reaching for that Infinite Love because abiding in that state is how we were made to be.

(SLIDE)

Think of the Christmas joy that was felt by both Elizabeth and Mary, both filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit as God at work.

And yes this is work, God's work, Godly work. God with

us. Immanuel. Love with us.

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

The Mighty one has done great things for me.

He has filled the hungry with good things. And sent the rich away empty.

God delights in filling empty wombs with life, with joy, with good things, with love.

(SLIDE)

Sam Wells has called this act of God being placed into the arms of Mary to be nurtured and cared for, and to be loved, as “the disarming love of God”.

That’s quite a thought. That God gives Godself away into human hands to be loved and nurtured.

I wonder what it is that God has placed into our hands to help bring love into this world.

Is it the nearness of our neighbour? Is it the strangeness of the stranger? Is it simply the gift of God’s presence which waits to be nurtured from within?

I pray that as we grapple with what it looks like to be love in the world that we will each enlarge our capacity to entertain God with us as we prepare to receive the gift of another Christ Mass.

An ever deepening measure of grace and peace and joy and love waits to be discovered in each of us. May we unwrap it and enjoy it for our own good and for the good of all.

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.