

Loved with everlasting love

John 13:1

Imagine that God is thinking about you, what do you think he feels when you come into his mind?

David Benner¹ asks this question and says:

“When I ask people to do this, a surprising number of people say that the first thing they assume God feels is disappointment. Others assume that God feels anger. In both cases, these people are convinced that it is their sin that first catches God’s attention.”

Hold onto that thought, and let me try to answer the question (*what do you think he feels when you come into his mind?*) from the gospel of John, as Jesus moves into the final phase of his life.

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love².

John 13:1 (New International Version)

The full extent of his love drove him to extremes. The extreme of Bethlehem – when he entered the world through the birth canal of a woman. The extreme of Nazareth – when his preaching had him run out of his home town. The extreme of Gethsemane – where even Jesus asks whether there might not be another way. The extreme of Golgotha – the Son of God dying for the sins of the world.

Real love is extreme.

Not only is it extreme - there is always the risk that real love will not be returned – John will tell us how one of Jesus closest friends would turn away completely – how *all* his friends would desert him when he needed them most. But Jesus went ahead anyway, because he loved them.

Love is extreme.

On the cross, that first Good Friday, he showed us the full extent of his love; the full extreme of it; that’s how far it goes.

Now let’s get this right. Jesus death was not just a *demonstration* of love – “Here’s how much I love you, I am prepared to die for you, see!” Like the young man throwing himself off Niagra Falls just to show his girl that he loves her. His death was *essential*, he had to die for us or loose us forever.

¹ Quotes are from “Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality” by David Benner, published by IVP-US

² Or he loved them to the very end (New Living Translation)

There is an idea around today that the Christian view of the cross is barbarous. How can you believe that God punishes sin – what an uncivilized idea. How absurd to suggest that Jesus took our punishment for us – that sounds like “cosmic child abuse”³. And of course it *is* absurd, to suggest that Jesus took God’s bullet, that Jesus stood still while God tortured and killed him.

It seems barbaric until you see the truth that lies at the heart of the cross; “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting men’s sins against them*”⁴. In Jesus, God took his own bullet (*God was in Christ*) – he would not ask anyone else to do so (*reconcile the world to himself*) – no-one else is big enough.

Now imagine that God is thinking about you, what do you think he feels when you come into his mind? Disappointment... anger...

Many of us have grown up with a profoundly unhelpful idea of God. He is the judge in *Pop Idol* making the contestant squirm, the audience in *Big Brother* voting out the ones he dislikes, he is Alan Sugar in *The Apprentice* – looking down at us and saying, “You’re fired!” Religion concentrates on cultivating this kind of fear in people. The theory goes that if you keep people on tenterhooks about whether they are going to make the final cut into that will sharpen their performance.

That’s why I hate religion – I really do.

God’s love for us is strong, persistent and positive and extreme! The Christian God says that he is Love, and that love pervades every aspect of God’s relationship with us.” So when God thinks of you he does not see your sin first, he sees *you* and he loves you. The last days of Jesus prove it, it was then that he showed you the full extent of his love.

Jesus showed no interest in this kind of thing – even if his followers over the centuries have slipped back into it. For some of us it is hard to imagine that God feels deep love for us, that his love is not related to our performance. His love is extreme and it is constant and it is freely bestowed upon us. It will not change.

- It will not change if you never go to church again.
- It will not diminish if you never pray or read your bible again.
- It will not alter one whit if you never ever share the gospel with anyone – ever.
- Whatever you do, whatever you fail to do, God will still love you.

On the cross, that first Good Friday, he showed us the full extent of his love; the full extreme of it; that’s how far it goes.

This is the moment in a message when I normally drive home the practical implications for our behaviour. “This is what you must do!” I say. Well not today.

³ Steve Chalke, a guy I respect very much, used this silly phrase.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:19