

Introduction: Shrek!!

- What is love?
 - *"An intense feeling of deep affection; a deep romantic or sexual attachment to someone" (New Oxford Dictionary)*
- We love to explore what love is all about:
 - many of the great films; much of the interest in TV soaps; books; magazine articles; source of much conversation.....
 - have you ever seen the animated film "Shrek"? Its (partly!) a love film!
 - **summarise Shrek plot:** ogre, gets forced into a quest to rescue a Princess (Fiona); she's wanting the **"damsel rescued, falls for rescuer"**; but he's an ogre! Lovely/unlovely! As they journey back from the rescue, drawn to each other despite surface appearances, love grows but is unacknowledged!; mis-understanding, mis-communication, split... love tested, will it break the stereotypes and expectations of others?
- Is love just that romantic thing?
 - no - love of parents for children and vice-versa, all other love within families; love of close friends....
 - again, source of much material for films & stories exploring this **"Crazy little thing called love"** (as the Queen song put it)
- **Our world loves love:** talks about it, revels in it, even practises it all the time.
- As Christians we use the language of love a lot of the time to express our faith:
 - *"Come let us sing of a wonderful love"; "Father we love you, we worship and adore you"; "Come down, O Love Divine"; "Love Divine, all loves excelling"*
- Maybe it's just me, but I suspect we are less sure of what that language actually means in this context:
 - maybe we're just afraid to explore it?
- I think we have some tendencies, that this part of 1 John 4 helps us address:

Tendency 1: We don't really know how a "big" God can love us

- When I say "I love you" to Helen or the boys, it is an intensely personal thing.
- When I say "I love you" to the Lord, how personal is that?
 - **it is easy to de-personalise God's love;**
 - to think about it as a great, big, wonderful love, but not love for me;
 - like a kind of blanket covering love, rather than for me;
- *...for OUR sins... (v.10)*
- Personal; not just for **"all the sins of the world"**, but for your sin:
 - he saw **me** a sinner; he saw **me** unlovely; he chose to love, and his love for **me** took him to the Cross; not nails that held him there, but love for **me**
 - not just the grand gesture, to "show off" His love; but show TO us, each and every one
- **I love my son Peter; he's great!**
 - but I didn't love him any the less when Andrew or Mark joined him;
 - I love each of them too!
 - and I don't love Peter any the less!
- That's what God's love for each of us is like - not diluted by his love for everyone else!
- Perhaps we will always struggle to take this in:
 - but God's love for us is unbelievably personal!

Tendency 2: To Say & Sing that we love God, but not Show it

- If I say I love someone, anyone looking on would expect it to make a difference to my behaviour:

- if I love my someone, I'll spend time with them, I will treat them with respect, I will protect them - reputation as well as physically - I will give to them, etc, etc
- if I didn't, folk would rightly question the truthfulness of my declarations of love!!
- I suspect that this is another area where we have a tendency to apply a different standard to love for God:
 - fine to say love God, by presence in church, by our words in songs or in prayers;
 - but harder to see how that makes a difference to our lives?
- John's words here are quite clear:
 - (20) *If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. (21) And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.*
 - love for God will inevitably change our behaviour - not merely towards a kind of grudging obedience to a set of religious rules and expectations, but towards a love for those who God also loves.

Tendency 3: Water down what we mean by loving one another

- The third tendency we have, I fear, follows from the second:
 - we tend to water down what we mean by loving one another
- "Love one another" comes to mean / or we allow it to mean:
 - say hello up the High St to others from church;
 - have coffee in the coffee bar;
 - be pleasant, not rude, nice, upright...
- Real love is costly!
 - time, effort, money, perseverance & humility (admitting mistakes, making things up)....
 - and it really, really, really isn't easy!
- How can we truly love one another?
 - pick out particular folk who you have some chance of loving:
 - *could be as simple as folk who sit near you regularly in church*
 - "How can I love them?" - pray that one through, and act on what conclusions you come to!!

Conclusion

- How does love grow?
 - by a growing appreciation of the loved one, a greater joy in their presence, a greater sense of their worth....
- Same applies to our love: for God and consequently for others:
 - as we focus on the Cross, on the heart of our faith, on what God has most fundamentally done for us, our love for him will grow;
 - and John teaches us here that it is out of this love from God that our love for others will grow - we will begin to see others as he sees them; to see that he loves them with the same intensely personal love he has opened up to us.
- So it is our prayer that God would bind us together in love:
 - not just a wishy washy, nicey, nicey feeling towards one another;
 - but with the love he has for each individual here, a love that took him to the Cross, a love that purchased our very lives, a love that desires to re-make us for the glory of God, a love that welcomes us into a brand new, eternal family;
 - a love that isn't limited to words and to songs, but whose scope fills the whole of our lives.