

Sunday 6th April 2025 – John 12: 1-8

Love – it's a funny little word, isn't it? We can use it in so many ways.... I love chocolate; I love the beach; I love knitting.

And when we hear it, it can mean so many things.

Our understanding of love is shaped by our own experiences; we carry so much baggage to this small – and yet very important – word. Love.

Today, known as Passion Sunday, marks our entry into the final stages of Lent: Passiontide. Passion, in this sense, means suffering, and anyone who has ever loved will understand the link between love and suffering – a strong, almost uncontrolled love – a passion.

In today's gospel reading we observe a scene in Bethany, the week before Passover, as Jesus is preparing to enter into Passion; suffering; love. As I was reading it this week, I found what really caught my attention wasn't the difference of opinion between Judas and Jesus over Mary's use of the expensive perfume; it was the way the different Languages of Love are demonstrated in this scene.

Because love is such a difficult word to pin down and understand, The Five Love Languages is a tool that was developed to assist in not just romantic relationships, but *all* human relationships. It approaches the idea of love from the understanding that people with different personalities will give – and receive – love, in different ways.

The first love language is Quality Time: a showing of love for another by prioritising time spent with them. This is time together without distractions. We see this demonstrated by Lazarus, who invited Jesus for a meal, and is found in this scene at the table with Jesus, spending time with Him.

The next love language is Acts of Service: demonstrated by Martha as she serves the meal. She is showing love for both her brother, by facilitating his wish to spend time with Jesus, and for Jesus by directly serving Him at the table. Undertaking a task for the benefit of another as an expression of love. Martha is also showing an understanding of how her expression of love differs from her sister's. Rather than getting frustrated that Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet whilst she, Martha, gets on with the work; here each sister is behaving with grace and respect in letting the other express love in *their* language.

And then we see her sister Mary, also providing an Act of Service in bathing Jesus' feet with the perfume. But Mary's love for Jesus also demonstrates two of the other love languages: Gifts, through her giving of the expensive perfume, and Physical Touch, by anointing Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. For some, the words 'I love you' are meaningless when compared to the giving of a thoughtful, personal gift. Still others find

they can better express love through a hug, a squeeze of the hand, a touch of the shoulder, the brief resting of a head against another. The physical contact with another human offering the reassurance of being there at this moment.

Then lastly, in Jesus' response to Judas, we see the final love language demonstrated: Words of Affirmation. Hearing 'I love you' can be hard if it's declared from a voice that often nags rather than encourages. Jesus defends Mary's actions when Judas questions them, changing this scene from one of profligate waste of resources to one of love which flows gratuitously between the characters, through the story, and into our lives today.

How do we include ourselves in this story of love? How do we show love for others, and for God?

As we are made in God's image, we could begin by consciously, deliberately, seeking Him in, and showing love to, those around us. We can be aware of how we spend our time; this morning, right here, we are giving Quality Time to God, for example. We can perform Acts of Service to those around us; in fact, allowing others to perform Acts of Service to us *is itself* an Act of Service.

Gifts of love don't need to be expensive – they can be little 'love tokens' which say, 'I saw this and thought of you', and we can give Gifts to God through churches, charities or directly through other individuals.

We can show love through physical contact in being alongside others, being a listening ear when needed, or holding someone in prayer. And we can show love through our words in being careful to make them affirming and encouraging.

Because love isn't static, it flows in many directions, so we can also look for ways to experience the different languages of God's love:

We can make Quality Time to spend with God, without distractions, to make ourselves ready to receive His love. The more often we can do this, the more we will begin to hear God's love languages. We can hear God's Words of Affirmation speaking to us through scripture, hymns, or in the wisdom offered us by trusted friends. We can allow others to offer us Acts of Service without defensiveness or shame, and experience God's love as a Gift in these situations.

I wasn't sure how it was possible to experience God's love through the language of physical touch until someone recently shared with me that God's love runs right through His creation, and therefore we can feel His touch in the warmth of the sun on our skin; in the feel of the breeze in our hair; when we dip our toes in the sea, or catch the rain on our faces.

And shortly, we will together receive the Eucharist together; to hold in our hands the broken body of Jesus, given by God to this world that He loves more than *any* language can fully communicate.