



**May 14th**

# THE NEW SHOFAR

***No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for another, a sacrifice of love in imitation of Jesus our Saviour's own love for us.***

## ***Love: the free flowing presence of God in creation***

Love in the Bible is all about engaging with God and with our brothers and sisters in a way that is life changing, world changing. In the Hebrew Bible the model for loving is provided by God. God *so loved* the men and women he created that he entered into a loving relationship with a ragtag mob of men and women called the Hebrews. They had little going for them but that was a part of the point God was making. Love is his free gift to them. And this is how we know about the loving character of God. The divine love was made evident in the calling of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. It was made manifest to all in the release of Israel from bondage in Egypt and her exodus from slavery to a new life of freedom in the land of milk and honey. These are the marks of God's love.

The highlight of the loving ways of God was revealed in the Covenant made with this people at Mt Sinai. God was under no compulsion to cut such a covenant. It was not something the people deserved or had earned. It was freely given and they were free to accept or reject it. Sadly, throughout history they managed to do both.

## ***Divine love is always a verb – God is lov-ing***

That is divine loving in action. God loved Israel and the expectation was that Israel would love God in return. This was the bedrock on which the relationship was built... *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* Loving with the totality of our being. **Hosea** used the metaphor of marriage to try and explain this covenant relationship... *I will take you as my wife forever* says God, *I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I shall take you for my wife in faithfulness and you shall know Yahweh (2:19-20).*

This is why the word most frequently used word for love in the Hebrew Bible is **hesed** variously translated as loving kindness, steadfast love. It includes notions of unconditional commitment, enduring compassion, mercy and care. For the Hebrew people it was also used as a title or a name for God. **Hesed** is what God is doing, is always doing as he invites us to share in his saving love. **Hesed** is who God is, what God does.

## ***Loving in the Gospel of John***

For the evangelist, love is the freely given, unmerited concern that God has for us, a compassion that manifests itself in the sending of his only Son so that we may inherit the gift of eternal life. The expectation of God is that this diving lov-ing be made evident, made visible to people through the way in which we **are reaching out** to others in love (a **continuous present** - is happening now, constantly, and will continue into the future).

This is the way we see God, but for John, if we love one another, God abides in us and that divine love flows freely into the world through us (**1 John 4:12**). As we obey God's commandments, God abides in us and we abide in him (**1 John 3:24**). This divine indwelling is brought about by the Holy Spirit. John sets down for us the logic of such faith:

- Jesus is God's only Son and is loved by the Father – **John 3:35**.
- The Father loves the Son and places all things in his hands – **John 10:17**.
- The Father loves me because I lay down my life in order to take it up again – **15:19**.
- As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in that love - **John 17:24**.
- We abide in the love of Jesus and the Father for each other when we keep the commandments that Jesus has set down for us as a way of life - **John 15:9**.

***Doing the will of Jesus** is the necessary condition for sharing in that love. For love to be genuine, it must be manifested in our words and actions... Such a love, however must be more than mere words. It has to be manifested by deeds (**1 John 3:18**...*Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. This includes the keeping of the commandments of Jesus...***John 14:15**...*If you love me, you will keep my commandments...***14:21**...*They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them...***14:23**.*

### ***Hesed is a world changer***

Is world peace too much to hope for? Is it too fanciful to believe that we can end violence of every kind, abuse, hatred, unjust discrimination and help build a world where justice, mercy and love reign supreme? According to the Jesus revealed to us in the Gospel of John, this renewed world is offered to us, promised to us by God, made real for us by God.

It is by beginning the rebuilding of our new world with ourselves. We reject the ways of abuse and violence by loving our neighbours – any and all of them without exception. When we live this kind of love, we have God abiding in us and we abide in God. It is the God in us who works through us – all 2.2 billion of us or 25% of world's population – who transforms our world. 2.2 million people living in loving ways with our neighbour is a lot of love! God is *hesed*, ever loving, always reaching out, always engaging with us, alongside of us. It is only in our failing to *be lov-ing* that darkness has a way into the world. It is only in God's Holy Spirit that overcoming darkness with Light is possible.

### ***Evil has been overcome and remains defeated when we love***

Whoever loves Jesus and keeps his word receives the love of the Father and all things become possible. As it is with Jesus, the Father will come to us in order to make his home within us. As disciples we are where Jesus is – woven into the sphere of God's love. The world must recognise that Jesus has been sent by God and that God loves the disciples as he loved Jesus before the foundations of the world. Therein is our power to transform.

Whatever love is, a genuine Christian love for our brothers and sisters is a love that is always expressed in concrete ways. This is what the Father did for us. He expressed his great love for us (*hesed*) in his saving works in Israel and in the sending of his only Son.