**1 John 3:13-18**

**Living sacrificially**

We are continuing our series of sermons on the 3:16s, which are those chapter 3 verse 16 of various books of the Bible that seem to be particularly important to us in explaining the basics of the Christian faith.

We’ve looked at quite a few so far and today we are looking at 1 John 3:16, which says this: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”

Of course, this is quite a moving verse for us to think about during the Remembrance season. Over the course of the last week, we have been to, and watched on TV, many Remembrance Day events and we have heard many stories about how men and women have bravely laid down their own lives in the service of others and their nation. And we are grateful for their sacrifice and we honour their memory.

But in this verse, John may be thinking about the laying down of our lives in a slightly different way. Of course, we may be called to physically give up our lives to save someone else

but I think that what John is driving at here is the need for each one of us to live sacrificially for the good of others; the need for each one of us to put our own desires and ambitions aside

in the pursuit of loving others and seeking what is best for others; the need for each one of us to put others before ourselves which, of course, is what Jesus did for us not only in the way he died but also in the way he lived each day too.

1 John 3:16 - “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”

Putting the needs of others before ourselves – the pursuit of sacrificial living – as John says here, is how we know what love is.

And as John goes on to say in verse 18: “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth”. Our love is made manifest not so much through what we say but through what we do – our actions and deeds.

We live in a world today that is so full of anger and hate.

It is so sad to see so many good politicians, particularly female politicians, standing down as MPs before this election because they have been overwhelmed by the depth of hate messages and threats that they have received, purely for doing their jobs. OK, we may or may not agree with their political points of view, but when did it become OK to respond to someone with a different political viewpoint with death threats, or threats of rape, or threats against their family.

It’s absolutely not OK to do that.

In the last three weeks, I have received some really angry and hate-filled e-mails from a group of people who don’t like what we are doing at St. Andrew’s Church. It’s OK to disagree with me about the direction of the church but these people – who don’t even come to St. Andrew’s on a regular basis – have written stuff so full of anger and judgement and with hints of threat that it really is not OK to talk to someone like that.

We see it on social media, we see it in road rage, we overhear it in conversations…so much anger that is just bubbling under the surface.

And what the world needs now, more than ever before, is a counter-cultural witness from the church, the living out of an alternative way of being, which is based on kindness and compassion and respect.

I am sure that kindness is the greatest gift that we have to offer the world in this day and age…

As John writes here, “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth”.

The Bible so often uses the phrase ‘one another’: Love one another, encourage one another, pray for one another. But it never says: Judge one another, scrutinize one another, humiliate one another, shame one another, embarrass one another, point out one another’s failings…

We are to use words and actions only to build up one another and never to seek to destroy one another. That absolutely is not the way of Jesus Christ.

And so we must choose how we live.

Are we going to live with kindness and compassion, putting the needs of others first, or are we going to use our words and actions to humiliate and undermine and destroy others? How we live is our choice…and the way of Jesus Christ is to choose love.

It is God’s will for us that we choose to love others, not only in words but also in actions. And when we choose to love through our actions, together, we can make a huge impact on the world. Together, we are stronger.

There’s a great story told about the evangelist Tony Campolo, who is a wonderful man, but never afraid to speak his mind for God and never afraid to put people on the spot to get them to think about their own faith. And one day, he was the guest speaker at a church in the US at a Women’s World Day of Prayer Service. It was a big service, lots of people there, and at the beginning some notices were read out and the leader of the meeting spoke about a link church they had in Venezuela. The letter was from a missionary there and it said that they desperately needed to put an extension on their hospital to treat the many sick patients that were coming and, in order to do that, they needed $5,000.

So the woman looked at Tony Campolo and said, “Pastor Tony, will you pray for us that God will provide the $5,000 so desperately needed?”

Tony Campolo said, “No, I won’t”.

There was silence all around…

Tony Campolo said, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do”.

He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out all his loose change and notes and put them down on the table.

He said, “There you are. That’s all the cash I have on me today. Now, I want every single person here today to come up to this table and hand over all the small change and cash that you have on you. No cheques, no IOUs, no pledges. Just the cash that you are carrying. And if we don’t have enough, I’ll ask God to make up the difference…”

And Tony Campolo refused to go on with the service until every person present had come to the table and put their cash on it.

They needed $5,000 that day - but by the end of the service, they had $7,000.

Now, you may think that is a bit extreme - maybe you don’t - but the point that Tony Campolo was making was really profound. It’s not enough for us to just love in words and prayer. We need to love in action and deed too.

And when each one of us lives sacrificially – and we may not have much to give in terms of money or time or energy – but when we all give what little we can, then the world changes for the better.

John writes in verse 18: “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth”.

The Christian life is really very, very simple.

Jesus summed it up in two commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. Love your neighbour as yourself.”

That’s it.

How much more simple can it be?

Don’t overcomplicate the Christian faith.

Love God. Love your neighbour.

That’s all there is to it.

The whole Bible is an explanation of these two loves. And your life and my life should be the living out of these two loves.

1 John 3:16: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”

When we choose to love one another rather than to hate one another, we are following the way of Jesus Christ.

When we choose to encourage one another rather than humiliate one another, we are following the way of Jesus Christ.

When we choose to accept one another rather than to criticize one another, we are following the way of Jesus Christ.

To love God and love one another – that is what God requires of us; not just in words and prayers but also in our actions and deeds.

It is not always easy to do that because it goes against our fallen human nature and it goes against the way the world is right now and it’s far easier to go with the crowd and to criticize and gossip about people. But we need to ask Jesus to help us be transformed in our minds and transformed in our behaviours.

And Jesus, who was nailed to the cross so that we could be forgiven, knows the cost of living sacrificially.

Jesus, who endured so much pain and suffering so that we could live as children of God, knows the agony of living sacrificially.

So we can pray to him with confidence that he understands.

We can pray to him in the sure knowledge that he is not asking anything of us that he has not done himself a thousand times over.

So when we are tempted to live the wrong way, we can pray to Jesus and ask him for his help that we may choose love instead of hate.

1 John 3:16-18 says this: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

That is the heart of the Christian life.

We must choose wisely - and choose love in word but also in action, and in truth.