

Anglican Church Noosa
Confronting Jesus | Jesus the Lover
Mark 2:18-20 John 15:9-17
Rev'd Chris Johnson

I love the movie Aladdin. There is a beautiful love song in it called 'A Whole New World'.

Show Movie clip ...

Isn't romance wonderful; and probably nobody does it better than Disney.

It is the theme of books, of art, of sculpture and of songs. Lots and lots of songs.

So in our society today for the most part
love is about romance; love is a feeling

But of course, we all know love is much more than that. Love is about commitment and of course that involves marriage. But if love is just a feeling, then you can make marriage mean whatever you want it to mean. Hence, we get shows like Married at First Sight. Lots of feelings; little understanding of commitment.

The most romantic view of marriage is actually the Christian one. It is the ideal of commitment to one other person for life. The Christian wedding vows are,
"For better for worse,
for richer for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and cherish,
as long as we both shall live."

We all know there are all sorts of pitfalls in life which can derail those vows, but it doesn't take away from the ideal and beauty of that sort of commitment. And isn't it wonderful to celebrate Golden and Diamond wedding anniversaries.

The Bible talks a lot about marriage, love and sex. But the surprising thing is the primary image of marriage in the Bible is between God and his people. In the Old Testament God is the committed lover pursuing his people Israel but having to face rejection time and again. In the New Testament Jesus is the committed bridegroom come for his bride. But will Israel accept him? The Bible emphasises how strong the commitment of love is from God's side, but how fickle it is from the human side.

Rebecca McLaughlin makes the telling point that human marriage is meant to copy the divine blueprint of **God loving his people**. Human marriage is not just a handy illustration of our relationship with God. No God's love for his people is the original and we are meant to mirror that love.

In our reading from Mark Ch2 people question Jesus as to why John's disciples and the Pharisees had regular fasts, however Jesus' disciples were not fasting. Jesus' answer is that guests at a wedding do not fast while the bridegroom is with them...

Can you imagine going to a wedding and the couple announce a fast. "We haven't organised any food; we're going to celebrate our marriage by everybody fasting." Maybe they then add, "This is an

opportunity for everyone to think about the serious spiritual purposes of marriage". I don't think the guests would be too impressed.

No, a wedding is a time to celebrate, a time to party with the bride and groom.

Jesus is pointing to himself as the bridegroom. While he is with his disciples it is a time for celebration, a time for joy. In John 15 Jesus said, *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."* For Jesus spiritual matters are serious, however, they are essentially about having a first-hand relationship with God so this should be a cause for joy.

The passage just before the question about fasting, [in Mark] is the story of Levi the tax collector being converted. He was so happy and so excited he threw a party for all his tax collector and sinner friends and invited Jesus. The common experience of all those who accept Jesus is one of joy. It is the experience of gratitude

-that Jesus should love me,

-that Jesus would want a sinner like me,

-that Jesus can even use me as one of his followers.

All of this brings great joy. There's no time for fasting, get on with the celebration. The bridegroom is present.

The prequel to all this is the Old Testament. So let's look a little more closely at what I've already mentioned about God wanting to have a marriage relationship with his people.

In Isaiah 54:5 the prophet says this, *"For your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is his name"*

The problem was the Israelites were not loyal to YAHWEH as their husband, they strayed and went after other gods, like going after other lovers. In several places in the Old Testament this is likened to prostitution. In Jeremiah 3:1 God speaks through the prophet, *"But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers - would you now return to me?" declares the Lord.*

The Israelites unfaithfulness has led them into exile in Babylon. But the prophet Isaiah wants to assure them that God has not abandoned them. He will take them back.

This is the back story for understanding our reading from Isaiah this morning. The people are in exile in Babylon. So let's read again from v6, *"The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit - a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger, I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer.*

Adultery is a pretty big sin to have to forgive. I have seen it cause enormous heartache in a number of families over the years. To forgive, to rebuild trust, to love again takes enormous effort and Divine intervention.

When it comes to God and his people Israel, it is God who is the aggrieved party, God who has been deserted, God whose love has been rejected. And it is like God has said to his people, we have to separate for a time while you sort yourself out. Hence the exile.

Yet God stands ready to take his people back, whenever they are ready to repent. With deep compassion he will bring them back v7. With everlasting kindness he will have compassion on them.
v8

Rebecca McLaughlin makes a telling point about Jesus' miracle at the wedding in Cana. This is the story of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in John Ch2. It was the bridegroom's role to provide the drinks at a wedding. Jesus gladly steps into that role when the wine runs out. And not just any wine, but vintage wine of the highest quality and in abundance, 6 stone water jars each holding possibly 100 litres of wine each. I mean this is over the top extravagance. This is the love of the Divine bridegroom coming to gather his bride not just from the Israelites, but from the nations of the earth.

The apostle John records this as the first miracle of Jesus – he doesn't record a healing, or feeding the 5,000 or the stilling of the storm; all of which you might think were more urgent needs the Son of God should attend to.

No the setting is a wedding, and John says this is the first of Jesus' signs. It is a sign that the bridegroom has come to woo his bride back to himself. And the plentiful wine is a sign of his abundant extravagant love. While the bridegroom is with you, there is no need to fast.

The message in all of this is that

God loves you.

- Whether you are married or single.
- Whether you are in a marriage that is loving or one that is struggling.
- Whether you are contented in singleness or wish you were married.
- Whether you have a lot of friends or just a few close ones.
- Whether you find it easy to express your feelings in relationships or difficult?

We all have to look to Jesus for the deepest most extravagant love that our hearts need and long for.

People today are looking for love in all the wrong places. I think many people have bought the lie that there is this one unique soulmate who can meet all your needs and if you could just find this person life would be perfect. The truth is the only soulmate who can do that is actually, Jesus. Every other human being will let you down at some point, will disappoint you in some way.

So we need to look first to Jesus for the love we need. Let him fill your love tank, then you will have something to give to other people rather than expect they have to come through for you.

Does that mean we shouldn't have expectations in our relationships - of a spouse or in friendships? No, it's okay to share with someone what you would like in a relationship or when someone has crossed one of your boundaries and you think they are doing something unreasonable that's affecting you. Conflict is inevitable in any sort of relationship that is going to be a close one.

The real question is will you express yourself with a demandingness that the other person has to come through for you or your just not going to be able to cope. Your going to fall apart.

Or do you express your disagreement with the other person, confident in the love of God, confident that love has been shown extravagantly in coming of the bridegroom, Jesus. And his love will be enough.

Do you know him as the one who can fill your love tank, even when it seems to be so dry, even when it feels like other people have sucked all the love out of you.

Did you know ...

- We fill our love tank every Sunday when we worship God together.
- We fill the love tank every time we open our Bible and read God's love letter to us.

- We fill our love tank every time we come forward to receive Holy Communion and are spiritually fed by the body and blood of Christ.
- We fill out love tank every time you sit down and pray for another Christian and they pray for you.
- We fill our love tank every time we share a problem with a trusted Christian friend and we sense their love and care; and we know the Holy Spirit has been present.

Community surveys show that on the whole Christians do better on every social indicator, than the general population. Rebecca McLaughlin in her companion book 'Confronting Christianity' quotes some research.

In 2016, Harvard School of public health Professor Tyler Vander-Weel published research in America, which showed that regular religious participation, and mostly in America that means going to church, meant that people lived 20 to 30% longer.

Atheist social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has written, "Surveys have long shown that religious believers are happier, healthier, live longer and are more generous to charity and to each other, than are secular people."

But my friends we don't follow Jesus because he will make us happier and healthier. Jesus is not a self-help guru. In some cases, Christians will not be healthier, Christians will not be happier.

We follow Jesus because

- he is the Son of God,
- he is the King,
- he is the Healer and
- he is the Teacher; and
- this morning we have discovered he is **the lover**

and he wants to be in a deep and intimate relationship with us.

He loves us so much he **laid down his life at the cross to pay the price for our sin.**
And now he wants to call us his friends.

I'll conclude with this quote from Rebecca McLaughlin. She quotes

Song of Songs Ch8:6

*Love is strong as death,
jealousy is fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire
the very flame of the Lord.*

She says, "This is the kind of love that Jesus offers us.
I want that love with all my heart.

Do you?"