

“All our doings, without love, are nothing worth..” from the Collect of today.

Just as the unseen hands of the clock slipped past three, Janine pulled herself, up and up, through that long tunnel from the soft, deep, darkness of exhausted sleep into wakefulness, attention, focus. Bleary-eyed she pushed herself from the bed and stumbled to reach the child that cried out in pain and fear.

She did not hear the questions that flowed in her head, “Why won’t he stay asleep? Why does he have to wake me? Why do *I* have to care for him? Why is he ill?” She simply pulled him to her and held him and whispered words of comfort and love into his little, soft, sleep-crumpled ears.

This she did because of love.

Almighty God,
we are taught by your word
that all our doings without love
are nothing worth.
Send your Holy Spirit and
pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,
the true bond of peace and of all virtue
through Jesus Christ our Lord
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

“Falling in love” is a good phrase.

It is like being beside deep water, and being drawn into it. You have choices to stand, to turn and walk away. But sometimes you allow yourself to be simply pulled over the edge and you fall... beyond the point of recovering your balance. And you fall with sudden shocking change, out of air and into the water, where sound and motion, gravity and light all change.

This is a good image of falling in love. That transforming, life changing, completely new experience of love. When you have fallen in love the geography of the world is re-arranged, the priorities of life are laid out in a new order, and the direction of your soul is reset to new coordinates. It is exhilarating!

Jesus is talking to the company of his disciples and is asking them for their opinion of him. I imagine a good deal of head-scratching and not wanting to say something stupid, or waiting for someone else to go first. Peter (and here I am imagining what is not included in the text) looks at Jesus, and finds himself thinking, “I trust this man. I believe in him, even when I don’t understand everything he says. I would follow him. I would follow him to the ends of the earth. I would follow him into battle, and even into death. He knows the way. He walks with God.” And then those thoughts and feelings, like 2 plus 2, add up to seeing that “The Messiah” is the name for that person. “Messiah; Son of God.”

Peter does not say it because he is the first kid to put his hand up with the right answer. He says it unaware of the others around him. He says it to Jesus as the truth of the love in which he holds him. He is “Messiah and Lord” because of love.

Now a dozen years on Janine looks over the breakfast table at her son. His drooping pants and gunge clothing, his questionable friends, his slow disappearance into adolescence. She often wants to shake him awake! But she looks and she remembers her love, though she may not greatly feel it.

What is love when it is grown familiar? When the shock of falling into water is over, and water is now for washing dishes, and clothes and floors and windows, and boiling for tea and coffee. The thrill is gone, as thrills do go.

So she stands up, walks round the table behind him and rumples up his hair, and bends to kiss him, even as he protests, and says, "I love you. Do you know that? I love you. I hope today goes well."

"...all our doings without love are nothing worth."

But whatever we do in love is worth so much.

When people who love marry, they change love from being a feeling, a thing, which like the weather, is bound to alter, and they make love into a decision, a commitment, a vow.

Love when it has passed from fervour and thrill and overwhelming passion, if it is to then transform and become nourishing and life-lasting, it becomes a conscious choice. It becomes a compass bearing for your journey of life. No matter what mountain range of difficulty, no matter what mosquito-infested, fetid swamp life brings into your relationship, you keep going on the compass bearing of love. Even when the final destination you had glimpsed seems utterly unbelievable, you keep going. Love and Faithfulness become like True North, not like the feeling of the moment.

It was because of the love from which Peter spoke that Jesus called him the rock on which his church would be built. It was not because Peter was smart. (He often said un-smart things), or because he was rock-solid reliable. (He lied and denied Jesus was even an acquaintance). Nor was Peter a good leader, St Paul really did that work. It was Peter's dog-like loyalty in love, deep-felt, cemented by decision, able to forgive and be forgiven, stick-with-it love. "That," says Jesus, "is what my community of faith is built on!"

There will be times in your relationships of love, with husband or wife, with child or parent, with dear friend, when you will speak to them out of a love which you do not feel.

This might seem like hypocrisy.

There will be Sundays when you come to church and the words of the hymns seem silly. The readings are dull and the sermon so dull that you take refuge in counting light-bulbs. You long to be gone. And then you try to say the Lord's Prayer, or you come to receive the Body of Christ, that fragile wafer placed in your unbelieving hands, that touch of wine upon your lips. This too might seem like hypocrisy.

Are all your doings, which seem without love, or faith, really nothing worth?

I think they are of worth.

Because *the doing* of the things of love, or of faith, are of themselves of value.

They are offerings and gifts given by the poor in spirit.

They are brought in mourning.

We come to offer love, even when it is not felt, in meekness, hungering and thirsting for a righteousness we do not feel we own.

This behaving "as if in love" is the path that leads, not back to love, but through - to love renewed and deepened. To a second or third, fourth or fifth level of love.

Faith and love, like trees that seem to die in Winter, if we do not chop them down, can return with new and more glorious leaves of feelings, emotions, revelations. So we pray, and ask God's Spirit to brush us once again with the gift of love. The decision and the felt truth, of much, much worth.