

# Love Actually

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## WELCOME ONE ANOTHER

Watch opening credits of the film “love Actually”

Romans 15 v7

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

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I wonder which camp you sit in? Do we live in a world of despair with no hope or do we just need to look around and notice love is all around us?

Ian Warner has prepared a clip from the film at the front of the Church, maybe each time you come in you will be challenged to choose to look for love first in this Church!

I am not sure you can preach on this verse like this. How can you put into words what it really means to be accepted, welcomed and loved, how can you put a value on a hug, being valued for being just you, or just simply being listened to?

As a family after lunch sometimes, we play “The Family Dinner Game” where you role a dice and have to answer different questions on a topic like; what is your best memory; the place I would most like to live is... Because...

Joe my son got a question the other day “when did you last feel listened to?” I wonder how many of us could answer that question today?

However the question for today would be; when was the last time you truly felt accepted? No strings attached?

I would suggest we are never are fully accepted, 24 hours a day 7 days a week by the people we know. As much as we try to love people and accept people we can't keep it up.

My wife struggles with the fact I am right all the time, it's hard to accept it but it is true! Ian would struggle with the fact that I am probably the best football player on the pitch Monday nights and my DIY skills are legendary!

So often people will make snap decisions about other people, are they too tall, too short, to fat, to thin - their hair to long, to short - do they have any? The list could go on and on, but if we are honest with ourselves we all do it.

James 2 shows that the early church did it

**My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism. <sup>2</sup> Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup> If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," <sup>4</sup> have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?**

We can so easily welcome people inside and outside the church like this.

People often don't quite meet our own expectations and sometimes it's just plain hard to love and accept people we don't get on with. Sometimes we need to also accept that as much as we try and be nice to people, they will never accept us whatever we do. Sometimes that's hard to accept but we should not give up trying.....

I think the problem is, we so often accept people on the basis of what they do, how they appear and how they act, rather than accepting them as they truly are?

But what do I mean accepting people as who they are and how does who we are affect Christ acceptance of us?

Well briefly I would suggest that we have to go back to the beginning of the Bible and remember we are all made in Gods image, no one is better than

anyone else. We are all God's children, special and loved as Psalm 139 reminds us – 'we are fearfully and wonderfully made.'

Even if we don't know God, God knows us and always cares for us whether we accept him or not.

But the big problem is we are all flawed

God says in Genesis 8 says v21 " Never again will I curse the ground because of man even though every inclination on his heart is evil from childhood"

If you have watched Larkrise to Candleford last week Mille tried to find a cure for human frailty. We need to accept our frailties as well as others peoples.

Its key that that we need to accept we start from the same place. But thankfully God does not leave us in the place in the mess of life.

Scripture reminds us Romans 5 V 8

'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this whilst we were still sinners Christ died for us.'

1 peter 2v 9

'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.'

In accepting one another, I believe we need to see people through Gods eyes we need to see people the way Jesus saw them, as the prostitute poured perfume on him, he did not pass judgement on her, but only saw someone in need of God's love and acceptance.

If you take one thing from this morning, ask God by his spirit that you would see others as God sees them, precious and special and in need of love.

I have to admit I am not there with everybody in my life, but God is working on that. But it reminded me of a story from the holocaust about Corrie Tan Boon, I expect some may have read her books. She was a great Christian lady who survived the horrors of a concentration camp, where members of her family died. Then one day after the war she comes face to face with one of the guards from the concentration camp who asks for her forgiveness and acceptance.

She describes how she could not do it in her own strength but chose to forgive and accept him as the Holy Spirit enable her. The Holy Spirit enabled her to reach out to him even though she could not do it herself, she chose to let Gods spirit lead her and guide her and she chose to love him despite all he had done.

In accepting one another, loving one another and welcoming people into our lives I believe we have to choose consciously to do the same. We have to choose to forgive people who have hurt us and choose to accept God's grace day by day, and when we think we can't pray for Gods help.

At the heart of all we do in this church is acceptance and - love actually.

I would suggest in whatever we do, we will not be radical Christians until we learn to accept others in love.

I am not sure if you have ever wanted to go back in time to a particular era. I would love to go back and see what the early church was like, were they as radical as they appear. Or was it simply that they just showed a little love to people around them, accepted them and welcomed them just as they were. As in Acts chapter 2 v 46.

As I said acceptance and love is at the heart of all we do whether we realise it or not.

The Welcome team listens and accepts people as they want them to feel at home in the church.

At the Contact Centre we have to accept parents regardless of peoples past.

At Parents and Toddlers you have to accept parents will do things differently from the way you would do it.

In CYM you have to accept the children for who they are and love them for who they are.

At Network you have to accept that people may not know what their gifts are but out of love you want them to understand them more and grow in their gifts.

As the AV team you have to accept people will not do things the same way we do at Joint services perhaps, but still want people to meet with God and love him a little more.

The list could go on and on, I have the privilege of being part of a great small group. We may be an all men group but there is a bit on love going on. Over the years we have lived life together in all its ups and downs. We have learnt to accept each other just as we are.

Some weeks people are happy and on top of the world, other weeks people can be a bit down and as a group we don't always get things right. But I know whatever I did, whatever situation I faced, if they could, my small group would be there for me and I would be there for them. We don't always get it right when I accidentally kick Grahams bad foot there was not a lot of love around !

How is your small group going, have you found a place of love and acceptance in the church, if not talk to someone, pray to God or come up the front and pray about it.

Last week we talked about being part of the Body of Christ and all needing to play our part. For me the church is like this great flower arrangement.

If I took out a blossom in its own, it would be beautiful and I am guessing no blossom is the same. When the flowers are picked up each week you have to accept what you have, you take time to trim them and arrange them. You put some at the back some at the front the right colours together. You need a stand and oasis to put them in and you put them together, with love and great care. When they are together what a wonderful display they make.

It's just the same with us when we come together in love and acceptance what a display we can make in whatever ministry we serve.

But back to the passage, this verse we are looking at today needs to be put into context.

Read chap 15 v 1-7

V7 comes in the context of those of us who feel strong and in a good place is to help those feeling weak or unable to cope to build our neighbours up.

Verse 4 says that we, through encouragement of the scriptures, gain hope.

Some of you may know that I am part of Gideon's international movement where we leave copies of the bible in hotel rooms, police stations, prisons, hospitals and schools so that people may find hope and encouragement through the scriptures in times of need.

I could have chosen others such as the Easter team, Healing rooms or Street Pastors. But I thought I would get a plug in for the Gideon's today.

One of the greatest things we do is go round to schools and give each child a copy of Palms, Proverbs and the New Testament. You could argue that most won't read it and it will sit in the bottom of a draw.

But for those who do read it where do they go to for advice or discipleship? I wasn't at this school but do you know one of the only schools in Crawley whose year seven all took every copy? Ifield Community College, you may ask the significance of this, well who helps run a Christian youth club in the school Sue Lindridge and others , along with Dave Jordan and the Lighthouse team.

V5 says

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another.

Sometimes I think we need to see the bigger picture - all that we have - something to offer in service to God is important we may not see how it all fits, but we need to pray for acceptance and love for the things we don't fully understand and that all ministries have a place in the great flower arrangement.

We need to remember that all Christians in this town are part of Gods bigger body.

Someone sent me a link to an article about a downtown poor Church in the states, about how they took their collection, many could just about afford the clothes they stood up in. But they had a large bowl/ container at the front of the church and instead of putting money in that put in broken bottles, glass and anything that could have hurt someone. Why? I guess because it was their act of service their act of love for the community they lived in.

I wonder if we should do our offerings differently, put in notes of thanks for the way someone has helped us this week, or prayers or testimonies as praise to God, as well as money.

I said earlier I don't think we are ever truly accepted in life, well humanly that is true but when we come to Jesus for the first time and ask him into our lives I think that is truly the first time we are fully accepted. God loves us unconditionally and he can do nothing else day after day but love us, we just have to keep believing its true..

And our response to all that we have discussed should be praise to God, when we help one another our praise should be to God. We people go on community week and help those in need, our or their response, should be praise to God.

So this week accept one another out of love as Christ accepts us, enjoy helping and working with others this week in love, and see people as Christ sees them special and precious.

The challenge is how are we, as a church, going to change the town we live in with radical love and acceptance?

How will the story end?

