

## LOVE WITHOUT LIMITS

### VISION

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 at about 2pm in the Royal Bournemouth Hospital, my mum's heart stopped beating. It had been beating for a little over 85 years, in fact, in October of 2019 most of her family gathered to celebrate her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. There are some milestones in life that we consider worth celebrating; the birth of a baby; favourable exam results; sporting achievements; getting married - and reaching certain ages is one of them.

From the moment we are born, until the day we die, our heart beats. It is an extraordinary thing; the heart is the only muscle in the body that doesn't get tired – it simply goes on beating but, and although we know it to be true, we find it very difficult to accept, that one day, for everyone, the heart will stop beating. The truth about the human heart is that it has its limits.

Sometimes we use the idea of the heart to describe a person, we might say about a person: They have a big heart. Although, in reality it's not true, some people don't really have a much bigger heart than others, but we all know what we mean. We know that when someone describes another person as being a person with a big heart we are saying that the person is generous towards others.

We might say that someone has a kind heart, which is not possible in reality, but we all know what we mean. And we use many other words to describe a person by talking about their heart; they have a heart of gold; they are so open-hearted; they have a lovely heart; they have a heart for people or animals or the homeless or the refugee.... When we speak this way we all know what we mean. We never though, describe another person as all of those things, because the truth about the human heart is that it has its limits.

My mum's heart beat through 85 years, they were not all easy years – her life was, in many ways, a very tough one. She had many things that brought her joy, but also many things which brought her pain. And we all know what that's like, don't we? We all experience those things which bring us great joy, but we also all experience those things which bring us great pain. What is remarkable, is that through all the joy and all the pain, the human heart still beats. The human heart is remarkably resilient, it can endure considerable stress, but

what we know about the human heart is it simply cannot go on forever. The frailty of the human heart is that, in the end, it has its limit.

My mum had a heart for Jesus – and, my best guess is, you all know what I mean when I say that. She loved Jesus as best she knew how, she organized her life around her love for Jesus, and she wanted everyone to know about the Jesus she knew. Having a heart for Jesus meant she wanted to love people and she tried hard to do that. In some ways her heart was full of love; love for her family, her friends and those who didn't know Jesus the way she did. That might be true of us too, our hearts are full of love, for family, friends and those who don't know Jesus the way we do.

The truth about the human heart though, is that we find it hard to love, because the human heart has its limits. Let's be honest, there are people we find it hard to love, people we don't want to love, and people we simply don't love. Whatever kind of heart we might say we have, the truth is, our heart has its limit!

This might be a very depressing talk if it wasn't for one thing, in fact, this would be a pointless talk if it wasn't for one deep and profound truth. After all, you all already know everything I've just said, but there is a deep and profound truth that changes everything. It is true that the human heart will one day stop beating, it is true that, in the end, the human heart, however long it beats and however much it can endure, is frail and will stop. It is true that although we have the capacity to love, our love is limited.

But, it is also true that there is another heart that beats, which never stops. It is also true that there is another heart that can, and does, endure all things, always and forever. It is also true that there is a heart in which there is love without limit, and it is also wonderfully true that this heart has love without limit for you! This heart is the heart of the God who loves you because he loves you because he loves you... The heart of God beats across the universe from eternity past to eternity future, and it is the heart of God, love without limit, that changes everything.

In the beginning God created.... (Genesis 1 v 1)

These powerful words that begin the bible, change everything. They tell the truth about the heart that beats across the universe from eternity past to eternity future. They tell the truth about the heart that will never stop

beating. They tell the truth about the heart that never grows tired or weary; they tell the truth about the heart that has no limit.

In the ancient world there were creations, myths and stories to explain how the world came to be. The creation story as recorded in Genesis chapter one, is the story that changes everything, because it tells a bigger and better story than all the others. It tells the story of God who created out of nothing – ‘In the beginning, God.’ It tells the story that God is bigger and better, and he is the one who created everything. God didn’t need to create anything, God didn’t create the world because he was lacking anything. God created because he is love and the nature of love is that love gives. God created to give and share his love.

John tells us that God is love. (1 John 4 v 8) The heart that beats across the universe is the heart of God, and God is love, and God’s love knows no limit. God’s heart of love is a heart that wants to know you and be known by you. And God, in his love, has done everything he can to know you and to be known by you.

In the beginning God gave Adam and Eve a magnificent garden to live in and enjoy, but the human heart has its limits and they chose to reject God’s love. God’s love has no limit and he chose to pursue those he created and to love them anyway. In love he chose a rag tag group of people to be his people, a nation to love and to demonstrate his love to everyone. They chose, time and time again to rebel, because the human heart has its limit.

In love he rescued them from slavery in Egypt because his love is bigger and better than the story in front of them. In love he promises them a land of their own, a land full of goodness and future promise. The people rebel – they complain that they would have been better off if they had stayed put. The human heart has limits.

In his love God waits and hopes and dreams, for he knows what he has in store for those he loves, and his love has no limit. In love he sends them prophets – people to tell them He loves them, to tell them the best way to love, but the people refuse to listen because the human heart has its limits.

In love, God was not done, because his love has no limit. Because God’s love has no limit, we have Christmas, because God’s love has no limit, Jesus chose to leave the glory of heaven and be born as a tiny, vulnerable baby. Because

God's love has no limit, he gave a tiny, vulnerable baby into the care of two, young Jewish teenagers.

Because God's love has no limit he spent time with the outcast, the unwanted, the lonely, the downtrodden, the unpopular, the unclean. Because God's love has no limit, he healed the sick, touched the leper, spoke to women, invited his enemies to join him. Because the human heart has its limits, the people rejected him and turned against him.

Because God's love has no limit, Jesus endured the disappointment of the betrayal by his friends, the scorn and criticism as he befriended the wrong kinds of people, the hatred and opposition of religious leaders, the fickle nature of the crowds, the lies and slander in front of Pilate, the mockery of Herod, the physical pain of being stripped and beaten, the humiliation of carrying his own cross, the anguish and shame of crucifixion, the horror of death and the separation from his Father.

But because God's love is bigger and better, because God's heart beats across the universe, he raised Jesus from the dead – so he might know you and be known by you. Because the human heart has its limit, Jesus went to the cross, because God's heart of love has no limit, he defeated death and used it to bring us life.

I'm wondering what your hopes for 2023 might be? My best guess is that most of us, probably all of us, live lives that are, like my mum's, a mixture of both joy and pain. My best guess is that 2023 will be, for most of us, probably all of us, a mixture of joy and pain. I had a conversation this week with someone who said, what perhaps many of us might say: "I want to say that 2023 can't be as bad as 2022, but I said that 2022 had to be better than 2021... and I was wrong!"

There is not much we can be certain of as we look ahead to 2023, but what we do know, is that God's heart of love beats across the universe. What we do know is that his heart of love never grows tired or weary. What we do know is that his heart of love endures all things. What we do know is that his heart of love never quits or gives up or walks away. What we do know is that if we find ourselves in the depths, if we run to the furthest place, if we hide ourselves away, God's heart of love, because it has not limit, will meet us there. What we do know, is that because God's heart of love has no limit, he wants to know us and be known by us. Perhaps another way of saying that is to say that

because God's heart of love has no limit he wants to know you, and be known by you.

Because my heart is human it has its limit. My best guess is, that for me 2023 will be a mixture of joy and pain, but what I know, is that because God's heart of love has no limit, whatever happens, his desire is to be with me and do 2023 with me.

*You could call it the Miracle on West 65<sup>th</sup> Street. According to the Houston Chronicle, it happened at that address, in New York's Lincoln Centre, during a violin concerto.*

*The concert hall was bustling with warm, pre-performance hubbub before the announcer spoke. 'Ladies and gentlemen, kindly take your seats now; this evening's performance will begin in two minutes.' People glanced at tickets and hurried to find their rows. They edged their way down the narrow lines of seats to find, at last, their allotted places. 'Excuse me. Thank you. You're welcome. Is this my seat?'*

*Miracles often come without warning or fanfare, and this time was no exception. There was no hint that they were all on the threshold of an experience that they would never forget, a moment to celebrate decades later.*

*The purposeful din of the orchestra's tuning faded and the lights dimmed, hushing a thousand conversations. The audience was eager for the concert to begin, ready to savour the talents of Itzhak Perlman, arguably the world's greatest violinist. Perlman is usually the last person to take his place on stage, for though his fingers are staggeringly nimble, his legs don't work nearly as well. He was struck with polio when he was just twelve, and now he struggled across the huge platform to take his seat, his stumbling, ungainly walk aided by crutches and leg braces.*

*At last, he sat down, removed both braces from his legs, and placed his violin beneath his chin. He was ready – and in more ways than one. Perlman's brilliance is no fluke. He practices for nine hours daily. And for forty-five minutes before every concert, he is alone in his dressing room, with two security guards at the locked door. They have explicit instructions to let no one in under any circumstances. Mr Perlman has finished practising. Now he is praying. Do not disturb.*

*And pray he must. The concerto is considered one of the most important and difficult works in the violin repertoire. Its technical demands on the soloist are huge. Brahms' Violin Concerto in D Major is simply "unplayable" according to one virtuoso. That miracle night, Perlman was set to perform this extraordinary challenging piece that would last over six minutes.*

*A few seconds into the solo, the sound of a string breaking on Perlman's violin ricocheted around the hall. The unwelcome twang was an uncouth intruder among a myriad of perfect notes. The orchestra immediately stopped playing, their music tapering off chaotically. The crowd gasped. Protocol permits a musician to call for a pause, allowing time for them to hurry off stage to replace the string. It's quite impossible to play a complicated violin concerto a string short.*

*Impossible, that is, unless your name is Perlman. With a wave he signals the orchestra to continue. And then the unthinkable happened. Instantaneously transposing the music for three strings instead of four, Perlman delivered the piece flawlessly, his dancing fingers producing sounds of unprecedented purity and passion. Six minutes later, spent and soaked in sweat, he lowered his violin. The crowd sat in stunned silence for eight seconds. And then they rose as one to their feet, a wall of wild cheering and thunderous applause. The orchestra joined in, banging their instruments in homage and shouting themselves hoarse. Perlman called for a microphone, motioned for silence, and then the man with two busted legs and one busted string spoke:*

*"All my life, it has been my mission to make music from that which remains." His brilliance was expressed through something broken. The shattered string, which could have stopped the music, only served to accentuate Perlman's staggering talent. Greater glory came because the melody-maker used a temporarily useless instrument.<sup>1</sup>*

So, why not: my human heart that has its limit, held in God's heart of love that has no limit?

Preached and live streamed at Crawley Baptist church on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2023, by Rev. Ian Phillips.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in : Lucas, Geoff: "Creating a Prodigal Friendly Church," Zondervan 2008 p. 11-13

