

## 2024 TALK, QUIET COMMUNION WITH SOME CAROLS, 22.12.24

### 1 JOHN 1:4-1,3:1-3 & JOHN 15:9-17 – ‘LOVE ACTUALLY’

The film ‘Love Actually’ has become a popular, feel-good movie which often makes an appearance every Christmas. But not many people know the story of how it nearly didn’t get made at all. The director, Richard Curtis, tells of how he spent hours viewing all the ‘rushes’. All the many hours of film they had shot for this movie. And after this, Curtis quickly went into a deep depression. It seemed to him that the film he was hoping to make was going to be a complete disaster. A sloppy, sappy mess of a film. But after a while, he felt brave enough to re-watch all the different scenes. Gradually he picked out the best bits. And something different emerged. It was a remarkable turn-around. Curtis turned all those shapeless hours of film into a memorable story which has resonated with people ever since. Some people still think it’s an over-long ‘shaggy-dog story’. But many people love it – because many people love shaggy dogs...!

This story of Richard Curtis reminds me of what it must be like to be a ‘gold prospector’. You have heard of the ‘gold rushes’ there have been in different parts of the world in previous centuries & still today?. Crazy people spending hours standing in a river, panning for gold, for example. Back-breaking work, day in, day out. And they have to sift through a lot of dirt, a lot of worthless stuff, for a small nugget which could be priceless. Spending hours & hours, looking for tiny pieces of shiny treasure, which could give them & their loved ones a future. I’m reminded of Jesus’ story of the treasure hidden in a field. The treasure of the Kingdom of God. Jesus tells us that it is worth giving up every other **thing** in your life, to lay hold of this eternal treasure...

Richard Curtis’ verdict on the raw materials of his own creation was spot on. It is an accurate judgement - of any life lived without our greatest treasure: Life without love. Life without love is a ‘dog’s dinner’. A shapeless mess, without any sense or hope or direction. To put it more eloquently, in the words of Shakespeare’s Macbeth: ‘It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound & fury, signifying nothing’... Pretty damning, but it’s true isn’t it? Life without love is absolutely meaningless.

What makes it all worthwhile... What makes us rich is: ‘Love actually’... Where can you see love most clearly – except in Jesus? In the timeless tale of Christmas. Of our God who became poor for our sakes, so that we might be made rich, in every way.

In the words of that song by the Black Eyed Peas: 'Where is the love?' It's right here in the Christmas story of a poor, homeless mother, cradling her new-born son with hope, peace, joy & love. It's right here, years later with the same mother, broken-hearted & weeping over her dead, broken son. It's right here here, in the tear-filled eyes of a different Mary, as she recognises the Risen Jesus, outside of the garden tomb. Alleluia! 'The love that will not let us go...'

This Christmas, because of Jesus, because of our family & friends here & elsewhere, we can know this love. This 'wonderful love, tender & true, out of the heart of the Father above, flowing to me and to you'... Our imperfect knowledge of this perfect love is what makes all the difference in the world. This Christmas gift of love is from God – and it is for you... 'O what a gift, what a wonderful gift, who can tell the wonders of the LORD? Let us open our eyes, our ears & our hearts, it is Christ the LORD, it is He'...

Our lives only really make sense in & through Jesus. Our Saviour, the Saviour of our world is the one, true Son of God, who wants to return all us lost children to our true home – in God. When we know God loves us like Jesus, as our Heavenly Father, it's then that we truly come home.

Where will you discover or re-discover love this Christmas? It's right here in this story of Mary & Joseph, the angels & shepherds & travelling salesmen (I mean magi, of course)... It's right here in a baby born in the muck & dirt, on common ground – born to us. It's right here in bread & wine – given & broken & poured out - for us. God's gifts are held out & offered **to us**. Not gifts of gold or frankincense or myrrh. But gifts of hope, peace, joy & love. We are meant to take these gifts in our trembling hands. To receive them into our half-believing hearts & minds. Let's make sure to take time to unwrap God's gifts for us this Christmas shall we?. All those gifts bundled up in Jesus. Often it takes us time to properly open & fully appreciate any gift doesn't it? And it takes us a lifetime to truly understand what God has given us in Jesus...

The gift of love, which is for us... The gift of Jesus, who is for us. In the words of the Apostle Paul: 'Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!'. As we prepare to gather with Jesus & all God's family around the family meal table, let me read the words of a hymn:

READ 445 BPW Love is his word... (verse 2 & 7, plus chorus twice)

