

Dear Friends,

It seems only five minutes ago that we were decking the halls and singing the carols and preparing for Christmas – and then as soon as you know it, we have welcomed the wise men and shared their joy and wonder at the revelation of God's love on earth through the coming of Jesus – and on we go into the reality of our everyday lives, so that in the power of the Holy Spirit of love, we too can begin to find our 'way home' by living out the authentic love that we were called to do from the beginning.

And talking of love, it won't be long before that February 'Love is in the air' feeling is upon us. Yes, even in January, shops are – not only filling up with Easter Eggs (!!) - but filling up with cards and gifts to buy and send to your Valentine, that 'someone special' – from you, with love. And of course, the confectionary industry will be having a field day!

We will be jumping on the Bandwagon of Love as we gather for Messy Church: Love One Another – 4pm Sunday 9th February with the usual craft and activities, food and fun...

This is all very nice, but if we echo back to the love that came down at Christmas, we can see that love doesn't have to be all bound up with red roses and romance. Even if we are not going to be part of the red-roses-romance of Valentine's Day that doesn't mean to say we are unloved – we are all loved beyond measure by a loving God who made us and who loves us before the world began. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us in his beautiful message some 500 years before Jesus;

*"... This is what the Lord says; "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire you will not be burned - you are precious and honoured in my sight, and I love you."
(Isaiah 43)*

As I write, I am looking out onto the garden at the love God brings us in nature - watching the birds and seeing the shoots of snowdrops, daffodils and crocuses waking up - and I am reminded that the best things in the world are free and that love from the heart is the best thing in the whole world – and totally free, and without price.

Jesus only asked of us to live by two commandments – to love God, and to love one another as ourselves. Love is the key to the kingdom, it unlocks the door to peace and reconciliation, hope and joy. We are reminded of this in the hymn we sing now and then:

*God forgave my sin in Jesus' name, I've been born again in Jesus' name,
and in Jesus' name I come to you to share his love as he told me to.*

*He said: 'Freely, freely, you have received, freely, freely give.
Go in my name, and because you believe others will know that I live.'*

Free love truly makes the world go round – and comes in all shapes and sizes. Love is a verb, an action, an experience. To say 'I love you' is one thing, to live it out is another. Here in Farnham acts of love are being lived out every day in our community by many – food banks, community lunches, community transport and support, events to raise money for good causes – the list goes on...

Church goers and non-church alike are all into the business of looking out for each other in Farnham. Church today isn't simply about doing things 'to' people or 'for' people, but rather it is about doing things 'with' people in community, a church without walls, all working together for the common good of our community through the 'Good-News Christmas-Spirit' of hospitality, welcome and love. Let's celebrate that we are all in it together, making for a caring and loving community – marvellous!

The work of Christmas by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with the flocks, then the work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost, to heal those broken in spirit, to feed the hungry, to release the oppressed, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among all peoples, to make a little music with the heart...

And to radiate the Light of Christ, every day, in every way, in all that we do and in all that we say.

Then the work of Christmas begins.

New Year Blessings to one and all - enjoy the snowdrops and daffodils and each other, with love...