

**Addresses – Service of Readings and Carols**  
**Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2018**

In the News – Brenda Fraser

This morning I have asked three people to bring us some stories from this week's news that have to do with love. Brenda drew the short straw when I asked her to bring a story to illustrate where love was lacking.

[Story of the plan to build a \$5bn dollar wall along the US-Mexico border. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-46657393](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-46657393) ]

Reflection: 'Where is love?'

Do you know the haunting song from the musical *Oliver*?

'Where is love? Does it fall from skies above?

Is it underneath the willow tree that I've been dreaming of?

Where is love in our world today?

It's not just across the Atlantic that the unlovely and the unloving have hit the headlines. If we have eyes to see it we can find it much closer to home.

Where is love in a week when a beggar was found dead outside the gates of the Palace of Westminster?

Where is love in a week when a hotel in Hull cancelled the booking made by a charity to give homeless people there a shower and a meal and a bed on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day?

Where is love in a week when a man is arrested in connection with the death of a woman in Biggar?

And if we are honest with ourselves, we will not have to look beyond the end of our own nose to see actions and attitudes that might cause others to question Where is love?

The Christmas message that we celebrate and sing in these days is that in Bethlehem's dark streets is shining the everlasting light.

There is as much need for the Gospel in our time as there ever was and the Good News that we so need to proclaim in Kinross and in Biggar and in Hull and in London and to the ends of the earth is what we are here to reflect on this morning.

As the psalmist prayed in our first reading: 'Bring us back, O God!

Show us your mercy and we will be saved.' (Ps.80:3)

In the News – Claire Davidson

For our second story this morning from this week's news I have asked Claire to bring us a story to illustrate that it is not all bad news, but that love is alive and well in our world.

[Story of a wealthy man in Nigeria who pays the hospital bills of patients who are well enough to be discharged but cannot afford the payments required of them [www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-46637822](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-46637822) ]

Reflection: 'Here is Love!'

Earlier we thought about situations in our world and in our own lives where love is lacking. The story that Claire shared with us happened to be about a Christian but it would be wrong to claim that Christians have a monopoly on love. Extraordinary deeds of love, many of which reflect the description of love that the apostle Paul famously gives, are carried out every single minute of every single day around the world by people of all faiths and of no faith. We are all created in God's image and although that image in us all is broken, we each have the God-given human capacity to love as God loves.

Today in our community, family members and neighbours and those whose job it is to care will be looking after children and the sick and the frail in ways that often go very far beyond just what is required. The same is true in the hospitals and care homes of our nation and across the world. Youth workers and social workers and mountain rescue volunteers and lifeboat personnel and all kinds of ordinary people will today and tonight be putting themselves out and in some cases putting their own lives at risk for love of their fellow human beings in need.

Where is love? Here it is, all around us in the human family. Although the vast majority of people in our country and across the world who will be celebrating Christmas will not be doing so because they are followers of Jesus whose birth is the reason for the season, don't let us underestimate the goodwill that is generated by

the tidal forces of Christ's birth. It has changed everything.

In the News – Rob Packham

For our third news story this morning, I asked Rob to share a story that *did* highlight specifically the impact that the love of God for the world in Christ has in prompting love in Christians.

[Contrasting the demonstrations of the 'gilets jaunes' in France and Belgium in response to austerity with the humanitarian response of churches in the UK which Moslem mayor of London Sadiq Khan has this week described as an example to politicians.

[www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Sadiq-Khan-politicians-need-to-learn-kindness-from-Christians](http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Sadiq-Khan-politicians-need-to-learn-kindness-from-Christians) ]

Reflection: 'Love came down at Christmas'

John begins his Gospel with those magnificent words that we read a few minutes ago. John describes himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved and in his writings he shows himself to be the apostle of love. God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son. (John 3:16) This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ gave His life for us. (1 John 3:16) We love because God first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

So here is the challenge I need to lay before you this morning as we prepare to celebrate the gift of God's love afresh this Christmas. We inhabit a world where many are suffering this Christmas, where the cry goes up: 'Where is love?' And while especially at this time of year we can say 'Here it is' as many good deeds are done because it is Christmas not only by those who bear the name of Christ, but by all kinds of people, the message of the Kingdom might be paraphrased in the words of the old Wizzard song: I wish it could be Christmas every day. As God's people, as followers of Jesus, we are called to the way of the Kingdom, the way of sacrificial love not just one day or one season of the year but every day.

'Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine.' As the love of God was made flesh in Jesus, so let it be incarnated in us. Go from here today resolved to love not just in word but in deed,

not just in the sometimes remarkable ways that people do but in the truly extraordinary way that Jesus did, emptying Himself for the sake of the world, serving and giving Himself up. Let's make news in the world, let's make it right here in our community as we live out the Good News. Let it be Christmas every day and let all-lovely, divine love come down and be ministered through us to our needy world.