

Love hurts - Easter 4, 2024.

Don and Phil Everly recorded the song, 'Love Hurts' in 1960 as an album track. Though the words are very American teenager time-stamped, they still retain truth for many of us;

'Love hurts, love scars, love wounds and mars
Any heart not tough nor strong enough
To take a lot of pain, take a lot of pain
Love is like a cloud, holds a lot of rain
Love hurts'.

As we grow beyond our teenage angst and spotty heartaches, we begin to think of love in different terms - something more concrete, perhaps, with a mortgage built in; something that really could last.

When children raise their heads in our relationships, another kind of love surfaces - one you never thought you had, whether you be Mum or Dad, the love for your children embraces your world, which will never be the same.

As we find our feet in the world, it becomes clear that we are going to need more than both of the sorts of love that we have so far experienced,. Companionship becomes a priority, because the prospect of being left alone is not tolerable in the long run for most of us.

And somewhere in the back of all this come creeping the demands of society, which call for us to start having a care for our neighbour and those less fortunate than ourselves. Often this is found within a religious context, but equally often, I suspect, in a humanitarian one. This is the love or charity that is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13, that has become such a go-to passage for wedding couples.

Though I espouse the passage as relevant to their situation (pun intended), I do not think that it is entirely germane to their immediate circumstance. That comes a bit later, when 'love is like a cloud - holds a lot of rain.'

Love not only hurts sometimes, it also changes in character, like a photograph stood too long in the glare of the sun.

Let us just for a moment consider Jesus' needs for love, who spent his life giving love.

He was a human being in the prime of his manhood; amongst his followers were several women, several of whom I am certain would have given themselves completely to him, had he shown the need or desire. Are we to understand that this man never showed the least inclination for a closer relationship with any of those who were with him?

I am not going to suggest - as some have - that he did. There is a whole host of unverified

literature out there that suggests that he married Mary Magdalene and had a family with her. Do not believe it.

But consider instead how crushingly alone he must have felt, knowing that his mission was to be a solitary journey, and that those who were his closest followers barely understood his nature or purpose.

Consider also that his mother, Mary, who we see so often in the gospels as being with him at critical times - how she must have ached for him to stop what was clearly a headlong collision course with the authorities. Truly for her, love hurt.

Jesus himself weeps three times in the bible accounts; once over the death of Lazarus; again over the fate of Jerusalem; and again in the garden of Gethsemane. On each of these occasions the precipitating factor was love. Indeed, love hurts.

However, it is not such selfless love that usually causes us to weep. For us, it is loss - or perceived loss.

It has been said before that if you love someone you must let them go; if they return, they will be yours forever; if they don't - then they never were. Although there is some truth in that, I think that over time what starts as one kind of love morphs into another.

All those who have been married for any length of time will acknowledge that the first flush of romantic and erotic love they experienced with their partner did not last throughout their marriage. If it had, they would be exhausted, and burnt out in more ways than one.

Similarly, I think that the wide-eyed, awe-struck love we initially had for our children also morphs into something more mature and rational - however powerful it remains.

So it is not unreasonable to state that love can change its nature over time, also that there are different kinds of love.

The Greeks have held this view for centuries. And the love that is described in the bible in 1 Corinthians 13 is defined as 'agape' - often defined as unconditional, sacrificial love. Agape is the kind of love that is felt by a person willing to do anything for another, including sacrificing themselves, without expecting anything in return.

This is in keeping with the King James Version of the bible which uses the word 'charity' instead of 'love' in the Corinthians passage. Doing so possibly makes its meaning clearer for us.

If we were to truly try to keep to the letter of what Paul describes as 'love' in his letter, and the translators describe in the KJV as

'charity', we would certainly find it extraordinarily hard; it would hurt.

Let's just go back to Jesus again for a moment and think about who or what is causing his grief on the occasions he weeps.

He weeps for love of Lazarus - or so we are told. Or does he weep in empathy with Mary and Martha? Either way, it is out of love.

He weeps for the fate of Jerusalem and its population. He is foretelling the siege and destruction of the Temple when the city is destroyed by Titus in the First Jewish-Roman war of AD 66-73. Again he weeps for love of his people.

Lastly he weeps in Gethsemane. Here it would not be unreasonable to say he weeps for himself. He pleads with his Father that the cup of suffering be taken from him - but not my will, but thine, be done. He weeps for love of his Father also. Truly, love hurts.

Why - when it causes so much pain - would we look for love in our lives? To say that 'Love makes the world go around' may be right, but it also sends most of us crashing into things we never intended to.

Many sages have written on the subject, yet none has truly explained it; Max Erhmann's 'Desiderata' from 1927 says, 'Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be

cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass.'

My own take on love is that it is the only form of insanity that makes sense.

And I'm not sure if understanding that statement makes you more or less sane than I am.

You may search the literature giants; Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Dante - though beware of Milton, who famously said that 'Biochemically, love is just like eating large amounts of chocolate.' Beware, too, of Dante, who was rather dry and moralistic in his

approach; 'As a faithful Catholic and defender of the perennial wisdom of the Western tradition, Dante knew that true love is something morally elevating. It is not something that overwhelms reason. Love does not destroy us or make us miserable, as the courtly lovers so often asserted.'

I beg to differ with Dante here, as I think he is describing a state of mind, which, while admirable, tugs at the sense of moral duty, rather than the heartstrings.

Here we come back to Paul in Corinthians and the wedding service. Whilst we can acknowledge that 'Love' is a blend of the

Philos, Eros, and Agape, we can also see that here it is suggested as a sense of duty. We need to make up our minds to do something over which our minds really have no control - hence, in my philosophy, a form of insanity.

But this is, in fact, what we expect of each other when we enter into the contract of marriage. 'I will love you - come hell or high water!'

If you're expecting a feeling, you could be waiting a long time.

Someone recently asked me how we let God love us. I haven't formulated my thoughts on this one yet, but it's a good question.

But let's think again of Jesus and his need for love. The only way we see this met is in the camaraderie and friendship and closeness of his band of followers. The tight bond of togetherness that they held, especially in the face of persecution and opposition.

We see such philos-type love in AA, in our church, in sports teams, and - of course - in families. When asked to give up something for the good of another, this may mean loss or deprivation of something precious, but we lose it for the good of another. Nevertheless, once again, love hurts.

Taken to its limit, we come back to Jesus, who showed us that in fact the philos-type love has

no limits, because for him it turned into agape
- total sacrifice for us.

That is why John 15:13 is so important to us;
'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man
lay down his life for his friends.'

I hope you see that what gives you joy can also
give you pain, and that is why our search for
love in this world is really a form of madness;
because if you haven't got the message yet -
truly, I say to you, Love hurts - but it will
never stop us loving - if it had, where would
Jesus' example have taken us?