

Because

How often have we said to our children, "Stop doing that!" And the answer comes back "Why?" And the response "Because", "Because what? - "Just because"...We don't really need to give an answer.

In our baptismal hymn today, we sang those wonderful words

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow,
Because He lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living,
Just because He lives!*

How powerful is that little word because!

It crops up time and time again in the Bible,

Our Old Testament reading focuses on Moses and he is speaking to his people, reminding them why God has set his affection upon them, and he said, *God did not choose you because you were more powerful than other nations, in fact you are the smallest, it was because....God loves you and brought you out of slavery.*

Again, just because! No explanation needed.

Today we are blessed with the baptism of Cora, and I suppose if I was to ask Stephen and Lisa why they love their wee girls, I'm confident the response would be, because...their ours!

And that is a perfect answer.

Because, she is ours, and I think that is God's response to us, why does he love us so much. Just because...we are His! He created us, He knows us, He leads us. He is with us. Why.... just because!

The Apostle Paul was so sure of God's love, that he wrote to one of his churches,

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God's love is unlike our love. Human love is tainted. It's often a bargaining love, I will love you if...But God's love is unconditional. I love you because you are mine.

The wonder of God's love is that it does not seek to gain anything. It's all at his expense. One writer said, "Love does not begin until it expects nothing in return."

How is God's love demonstrated to us...

The first verse of the baptismal hymn tells us...

*God sent His son, they called Him, Jesus;
He came to love, heal and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
An empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives!*

The best book that I have ever read is *Les Misérables*, the story of the weak and downtrodden people of France before the civil war and Victor Hugo describes their misery through some brilliant characters.

Jean Valjean, who was jailed for stealing a loaf of bread and ended up getting 14 years and when he was released on parole, he was hounded by a policeman called Javert. He didn't give up and eventually hunted him down.

But the story has a beautiful twist of fate, when Jean Valjean, released from prison and on parole, went to the house of an old priest to seek overnight accommodation; there during the night, he saw his opportunity to steal from the old priest, and when he was caught by the local police and brought to the priest's house the next morning, rather than condemn him, the priest said, you forgot the silver candlesticks, but he said to Jean Valjean, I have made you an honest man, go and do likewise...

The story continues with Jean Valjean and his adventures and the people that he helped along the way, a young woman who lost everything and was thrust into prostitution, where she caught a deadly disease, and when she dies, Jean Valjean reared her daughter, and so because of the love that he was shown by the old priest, so Jean Valjean goes and does likewise.

Why did the old priest give him the silver candlesticks? Just because...he gave it to him because he had compassion and mercy upon him. For the priest received the mercy of God and his life was blessed.

An African poet once wrote,

*“There's a limit to the number
Of the wondrous stars that shine.
There's a limit to the wealth of gold
That's deep in every mine,
There's a limit to the number of the blades
Of grass God made,
There's a limit to the number of trees
In every glade,
But I know when I gaze upon Calvary-
I know that there isn't any limit to his love for me.”*

The Christian story is a love story, and the older I get in my Christian faith, the more I realise that my faith does not depend on theological arguments, on the existence of God, the problem of evil, as important as these things are, but as we mature as Christians, our faith increasingly rests on the experiential knowledge that I am loved by the world's greatest lover.

When Jesus met with Peter after his resurrection, Peter had let Jesus down, Peter denied even knowing Peter, now Jesus had every right to feel hurt, betrayed and every right to give Peter a real talking to but how does Jesus handle Peter, he asks him three times, Peter do you love me and Peter responded three times, yes Lord, I love you and Jesus said go and feed my sheep, go and do likewise.

It is a beautiful moment in the gospel of John because it tells us that at the last, the most important thing in life is love, and God's love is generously given, but it is also expected to be shared.

Like the old priest, like Peter and countless men and women down through the centuries, when God touches our life with his love, then we are called to share it.

This morning, I just want to ask you as a congregation, do you know how much you are loved by God? Have you any idea? Is God a remote force that sits in judgement of you or is he that friend that will never let you down and stands with you in troubled times?

When I was on holiday, I read a story that Willie Barclay recounts in one of his commentaries, it is the story told about three Allied soldiers who were the closest of friends, and who were fighting in France during World War II. One of them was killed, and his friends wanted to bury his body in a special place, and not just in the field.

So they brought the body of their dead friend to a beautiful French churchyard that had a cemetery within it. They asked the priest for permission to bury their friend there, and the priest asked them if he had been a Catholic. "No," they said, "he hadn't." The priest said that the man could not be buried in the consecrated grounds of the church, since it was reserved only for Catholics.

So the two men took the body of their friend and did the next best thing – they buried him just outside the fence of the churchyard.

The next day in the morning, the two friends went back to the church to pay their final respects to the friend that they had buried. But when they looked outside the fence, where they thought they had buried their friend, they could not find the simple grave. And so they went and knocked on the priest's house.

"We cannot find the grave of our friend at all!" they said, "We buried him just outside the fence."

"Yes," said the priest, "I could not sleep last night thinking of your friend and the love you have for him. I tossed and turned, until I decided what I had to do. I got up in the night and moved the fence."

God has done a very similar thing for us. He has removed the fence that separated us from him through his son Jesus.

Although we are lost and broken because of sin, and far away from Him, God has removed the wall of sin that existed and he has reconciled us because he loves us.

Perhaps, it's time that we also moved a few fences in our lives, don't you agree?

Perhaps you've come to church today and you feel that life is getting on top of you, you feel despair and hopeless. Your anchor has moved and you may think that you are not worth being loved and perhaps you might challenge God, "Lord, why do you keep loving me?" don't be surprised, if he answers

you with the strangest, oldest, shortest and most intriguing response in the English language – “Because...”