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Briefing 93: Wednesday 8th December, 2021.

Dear friends,

Do you remember those **Love Is...** cartoons? Love is giving her roses when it's not her birthday. Love is letting him watch the football even when *Strictly* is on the other side! Love is not reminding them that this is the 5th time you've got lost on a walk this year... The cartoons and words were often a bit soppy and romantic as they tried to pull on our heart strings, but in pretty much all of them, love was active. Sometimes in words said or not said. Sometimes in actions done, or refrained from doing. But always active.

And that's right isn't it. Love can't just be an emotional response (though our feelings are important) and it certainly can't just be confined to our thoughts; real love requires action. No wife is going to be impressed by her husband simply telling her that he *thought* about buying her roses and whisking her off to Paris if he then did nothing about it! No husband is going to feel loved and affirmed by his wife saying she *thought* hard about picking him up from the station in the pouring rain, but then decided to finish watching *Pointless*. True love cannot be just a thought. True love must include actions. That's true for the romantic love between a husband and a wife, but it's also true about love between friends and between Christians.

That point came across time and time again on Sunday as Ephraim at St Nicks, and Adam at St Mary's, opened up God's word to us from 1 John 4. Just as God's love for us was active- so active that Jesus left the glory of Heaven to enter our world to die on the cross as '*an atoning sacrifice for our sin*' (v10), so our love for God and our love for one another in the local church, must also be seen in actions. So we can't say we love God (nor have any confidence of our own eternal salvation) if we don't love our fellow Christians. Love, real Christian love, must be active.

How might we show that kind of love for one another? We were given lots of ideas on Sunday:

Talking to one another. That's something that we can all do. After church, on the telephone in the week or over a coffee (see below), simply making the time and effort to speak to people is an easy way to show love. I suspect most of us instinctively talk to those we know and like, but can we get better at speaking to those we don't know, or find difficult? And in all our conversations, can we look to speak words of kindness and encouragement, to build up and build faith? Can we learn to love each other more like this?

Praying for one another. Making time to speak to God about the needs of others is a wonderful way to show love, especially if we tell them that we have been or we will be doing it. We can pray on our own, in our homegroups, or then and there, when someone tells you a need. Can we love each other more like this?

Hospitality got mentioned a few times. It doesn't need to be grand or costly. Inviting someone for a coffee won't break the bank- especially if it's at home. Sharing a meal together doesn't need to be extravagant. Beans on toast, soup and a roll, or take away fish and chips can do nicely. Can we love each other more like this? We were also challenged to open up our Christmas tables to those in our church families or amongst our neighbours who might be on their own. Is there someone you know who you could love in this way?

And what about giving or lending to those in need? What about providing food, babysitting, helping with gardening, offering a lift, giving advice, a shoulder to cry on, spiritual support and encouragement? What about serving in church? What about simply making the effort to come to church every week? It's hard to love those we don't see. What about sharing the good news of Jesus with someone, or inviting them to church? That's a way to show real love! Amongst our church family, our neighbours and friends, there will be many needs, some of which we might be able to meet. Can we love each other more like this?

Loving people like this may be costly in money, time or energy. It might mean that we're not able to do or have something that we would want ourselves; it might put ourselves at a slightly higher risk of catching a

certain virus. But remember our motivation. **1 John 4:11. Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** God's love for us cost Jesus his life. That's the standard. That's our example. That's our motivation. Can we love each other more like this?

With God's help and his love in our hearts we can and we must. It's what we're called to do. It's a sign that we belong to Jesus. And such love not only blesses those we serve, it strengthens the church. It's also a sign to those outside the church that we belong to Jesus, and that draws them to Jesus too.

As we prepare to celebrate the first coming of our Lord Jesus, whilst also waiting for his return, let's make sure that our lives are marked and motivated by the same kind of active, self-giving love that God has for us.

Grace and peace,

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

COVID PROTOCOLS: A reminder. If you sit in a **masked** area of the church, please keep your face coverings on for the whole service. If you'd rather sit without a mask, please sit in the 'mask free' areas provided. Government advice is that we do take a **lateral flow test** before meeting lots of people. We have lots of free kits in church. Why not take one and use it either on Saturday evening or first thing Sunday morning before you come?

CHRISTMAS SERVICE INVITATIONS: Invitations cards for both churches are available. Who will you be inviting? Do take some for family and friends. Can you also help deliver them across the parishes? Invitations have already been delivered around Graveley village and Jacks Hill, but St Nicholas has 1800 or so to deliver across parts of the parish this weekend. By Thursday morning, these will have been bundled into labelled packs at church, ready to be collected. If you are free 2pm on Thursday, a team will be going out then. If you can't make that time, **Steve Bamford** can drop off some invitations for you to deliver over the weekend. Why not go out in pairs and pray as you walk?

PRAYER GATHERING: Wednesday 15th December 7:45pm in St Nicholas church.

We'll begin with sung worship, hear from God's word and spend time praying together for our remaining Christmas services, for the church around the world, our mission partners and for those in need. Come in person or ask for a Zoom link to join online.

Please note: This will be the last prayer gathering for 2021. We will start again in the New Year

Private Prayer in St Nicholas church NEXT WEEK.

Tuesday 14th from 2pm-4pm, Wednesday 15th from 12noon-2pm, + Thursday 16th from 10am - 12noon

GRAVELEY VILLAGE HALL COFFEE MORNING: THIS SATURDAY from 11-2pm. Children's games, a tombola, coffee, tea and lots of cakes & mince pies to eat! Please bring your friends for a pre-Christmas catch up.

READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS: The readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

12th December: Colossians 1: 15-20

19th December: Matt 11:20-30

26th December: Matt 21:1-11

BIBLE BY THE BEACH: Would you enjoy a few days of great Bible teaching by the sea? Come to Bible by the Beach in Eastbourne next May. Details are here! [Bible by the Beach 2022 - Bible by the Beach](#) or on the leaflets in church. If you would like to go, do let Mike or Evelyn know. 11 are booked in- come and join us!

MISSION PARTNER NEWS:

RACHAEL AND BERNIE MULJUTA: Send them a Christmas by using the form here: [Christmas cards | Crosslinks](#)

JIMMY + KATIA ROCKS IN BRAZIL: The latest newsletter from St Nicks' CMS mission partners is attached.

CHRISTMAS GIFT: If you'd like to contribute to a Christmas gift for our mission partners, please place your gift in an envelope marked MISSION PARTNERS or use the tap and donate machine in St Nicholas, selecting that option.

FINANCIAL UPDATE LETTERS AND FORMS: There was a slight error on the bank mandate for St Nicholas Church as the account name missed out the word **Council**. If you are using the form to set up a standing order, please note that the correct account name should have been shown as: *Stevenage St Nicholas Parochial Church Council Reg Charity No. 1161229 Membership Fund*. Updated forms are attached to this email.

Come + Pray!