

Poor Thomas... he was only being human! We all have doubts. We've all had doubts about Jesus' way of love: love of one's enemies, turning the other cheek, and going the extra mile. We've all had doubts about Jesus' kind of love surviving in the real world. Even in his own life Jesus' love didn't survive... it was ended brutally by the real world's power of hatred and revenge. Not even Jesus' love could possibly survive torture, crucifixion, death, burial and a guarded tomb. Jesus' kind of love and forgiveness was dead and buried and gone! Well, that's what Caiaphas the High Priest had hoped.

People doubt the power of love. They'll tell you that you can't just love your enemy *or your enemy will walk all over you*. You can't just turn the other cheek or *the bully will never give up*. You can't just be all love and forgiveness. There are many who have doubts about love's way and *the power of love*. After all of Jesus' preaching, teaching, and revealing love's way with his disciples, Peter still doubted the power of love and to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane he pulled out a sword! He doubted love's way: "You can't fight swords... *with love*" can you? Jesus says, "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword." But even so, Jesus' followers still prefer to keep swords handy... just in case, don't we?

Dr. Martin Luther King knew something about forgiveness in the real world, he said, "Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude." Forgiveness is God's constant attitude; let us seek to make it ours.

Many have stories that tell of **the power of love**. Some talk of love being stronger than evil, and of love shining in the darkness and the darkness never being able to put it out. And they are talking about their *real life*.

Some say *there is nothing love cannot face; that there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance*.

Some talk about love outlasting everything in the universe, and that it will never be destroyed, and never come to an end. Love is said to be as strong as that – yet we have our doubts. We doubt love's strength, and to be on the safe side... *we don't get rid of our swords just yet*.

Jesus said, "You have heard it said an eye for an eye, well, I say love your enemies." When hating your enemy fails, and fails, and fails, what will you do? When we hate our enemy it breeds further hatred, and breeds a hatred that often last for generations: becoming a cycle of hatred. Living with hatred, resentment and bitterness is no solution – and neither is yearning for revenge. Nelson Mandela stood against the South African government's human rights abuses in South Africa. In the face of a powerful hatred that can imprison you for 27 years he says, "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies." (Nelson Mandela).

Some doubt the power of love in real life situations, in the face of a powerful hatred. Some doubt what power love might have in the face of these? Others **doubt the existence of love** at all. For some all there is in life is abuse, neglect, abandonment, hopelessness and death. Theirs is a dark world. Don't talk to them about love! You have no idea what kind of world they live in, and your idea about *the power of love* is so naïve that it is laughable. "If love exists come down from the cross and we will believe." Jesus says, "whosoever shall

lose his life for my sake shall find it again.” Meaning that neither hatred, evil, darkness nor death will defeat the power of love.

Where some live in despair, hopelessness and darkness... how can love break the cycle of evil... or break through in the stench of war... or break through crippling effects of poverty? In reality love has been found to break through, breaking the cycle, and breaking the power of evil *when love has dared to venture where angels might fear to tread*. Jesus proved this.

To some people, *if there is love*, it must be out there somewhere, but it doesn't include them. To people such as this Jesus would break into their world and their cycle of hopelessness with God's love. He delighted to reveal God's love among tax-collectors, outcasts, Romans... even to Samaritans, and anywhere else where love's presence would surprise *and shock*.

That he revealed God's love out of the Temple, beyond God's chosen people, and in places that were unclean horrified some, because their concept of God was much narrower and far less inclusive. God's love for them was to be protected not wasted; God's love was to be respected by those who knew how, and not disrespected by the unclean; and God's love was to be moderated and measured and certainly not overflowing. To them God's love was fragile and not hardy, robust or powerful. Jesus challenged everyone's thinking about God... revealing that 'God is love' – not vengeful, not mighty in battle, not power horse riding but humble donkey riding. Many do not want a God like that... “No lord you shall not wash my feet...”

In the early church the Last Supper was called... the “*Agape*” or *Love Meal*. The sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion reveal Jesus' love to people who say they are not included. Down through the years the church has struggled to reveal the breadth of Jesus' love for all people. Jesus' *Invitation* was replaced with church *regulation* and soon the Love Meal was fenced to ensure that only the worthy received. It was known as ‘**the fencing of the table**’- it kept the sacrament and people apart, sometimes it was a fence, sometimes it was a fence with stairs, and sometimes it was a fence with stairs and with dividing wall. This method replaced the generous, unconditional, undeserved grace of an open table with a merited, deserved, conditional approach of testing before participation.

For those who doubt that such love exists or could ever include them, they are astonished that Jesus is with them on a battlefield, in a soup kitchen, at a well in Samaritan territory, or in their own house. The love of God breaks into the lives of people – when we take it there.

Jesus gives God's love and forgiveness away... *and have you seen who he's giving it to?* Jesus bypasses the Jerusalem Temple, the Jewish authorities, and the cherished faith tradition as he gives God's love and forgiveness away. In today's Love Meal/ Holy Communion we will again see Jesus' love and forgiveness given away generously, graciously and freely, without condition. Following Jesus will you offer his kind of love? Will you make his love your goal? Put away your sword and your doubts and believe in the power of God's love.