

The Mission Statement of the Methodist Church of New Zealand:

"... to reflect and proclaim the transforming love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and declared in the Scriptures." Here we explore the meaning of the phrase "the love of God". We draw on the best teaching available to help us understand God's love. We see that the love of God has many aspects to it and that it is indeed transforming.

**"The love God has for us is so wonderful that it is far beyond our comprehension."**

*Julian of Norwich*

Here we are introduced to the idea that God is so great, and our minds so small, that we can never fully understand God. There are limits to our understanding. We live our lives before the mystery of God. This God, who is creator and redeemer, is also hidden. Learning to be content with God being free, means that we cannot control God.

**"God loves each of us as if there were only one of us."**

*St Augustine*

Though God is a mystery, yet at the same time, God is personal, It is the experience of the church that God knows each one of us, loves us and cherishes us. For some it can be an overwhelming experience. God remains elusive, yet we believe that we can be known by God. Each person matters intensely to God, and God cares about our well-being.

**"The love of God must wait for the recognition of those who have the power to recognize."**

*W. H. Vanstone*

God loves each one of us. But love never forces its way. Love does not coerce. So it is with God, God loves each person, and God waits for each person to respond. So in this sense, God is vulnerable. Like the waiting father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, God waits in love for our recognition. God longs for our return with great patience.

**"Nothing you can do can make God love you more. Nothing you can do can make God love you less!"**

*Archbishop Tutu*

This startling insight expresses a central notion in the church's story. We do not earn God's love. God's love is offered to each person freely and generously. It is not offered only to the good: nor withheld from the bad. God loves us first before we can respond. God's love does not depend on us! Nor can we lose God's love by anything that we do or fail to do.

**"God does not know how to reject anyone - only humans can do that! God is our ultimate lover."**

*Aelred Carlyle*

When we speak of God, we have to use human language. It is always inadequate. But we have no alternative. God's relationship to us is not like any human relationship we have. We are capable of rejecting another. But the God we have seen revealed in Jesus cannot and does not reject. In this sense God's love is different from our own in a critical sense.

**"God loves us exactly as we are, and God loves us too much to let us stay like this."**

*Ann Lamott*

Because we are created by God, God loves each one of us. We speak of this as God's grace. We do not have to do anything before God loves us. We are loved in all of our confusion and joy, our beauty and our woundedness. But God sees what we can become and is committed to helping us grow into our most authentic healed self.

**"In Jesus God loves us without condition, but not without demands."**

*Source unknown*

The love God has for us is unconditional: it does not depend on anything in ourselves, or any action we might take. God's love comes from the heart of God. But once we have awakened to the love of God in our lives, we begin to see that God makes a claim upon us, and God demands integrity, growth in love and a willingness to share this love with others.

**"...could God have done otherwise than loved us and suffered for us?"**

*Paul Fiddes*

There are consequences to the risk of love. Because God opened his heart to love each person and creation, then God exposed the divine life to pain and rejection. Love is like that. In the cross of Christ we see the extent of God's love in seeking reconciliation, and the suffering that God endures to bring a new creation. Out of anguish comes new life.

**"We have to be liberated from love for a God who just loves me or loves us."**

*Rowan Williams*

It is easy to think that we are chosen and privileged by the love of God. It may seem that God loves only us. But in Christ we have seen the universal scope of God's love. At the eucharistic table there will be brothers and sisters not of our own choosing. We will discover God loves some whom we find it difficult to love. This is deeply challenging.

**We believe in the tough  
tender, tenacious  
love of God.**

**We believe in the persistent  
persuasive, passionate  
proclamation of Jesus.**

**We believe in the silent  
surprising, subversive  
work of God's Spirit.**

**We believe that we are called  
to embrace the love of God,  
to walk in the way of Jesus  
and to be open to the Spirit of God.**

*Terry Wall*

Methodist Church of New Zealand,  
Te Hahi Weteriana O Aotearoa,

## On The Love of God



### Spirituality Series #6

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by the Rev. Dr Terry Wall.  
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Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven to earth come down,  
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,  
All Thy faithful mercies crown.

*Charles Wesley.*