

## My Last Message

I have recently witnessed the funerals of some of my very dear friends, and I have been reflecting on the fact that I'm closer to the end of my life than to the beginning. This has led me to wonder, if this is the last message I have to give, what do I want to say?

The longer I live, the less and less I believe, but the little I believe, I believe more and more...

I believe God is love and that we are made by love, with love, for love. I believe that Jesus embodies God and incarnates God's love in his life. Jesus calls us to love God and to love like God in whose likeness we are created. Jesus shows us how we can really, truly and sincerely love others as we love ourselves, including not only neighbours, but also strangers, not only our friends, but also our enemies. And in Jesus, we see, that in the end, love is not in vain, love triumphs over hate, love wins.



The fact that the word 'love' is not mentioned—not even once—in the creeds, which are the founding documents of Christianity I believe has led to a total, unmitigated disaster. Framed by belief about Jesus, but without reference to the love of Jesus, Christianity has often been reduced to a loveless campaign for a set of dogmas that have brought about a brutal litany of crusades and slaughter, inquisitions and torture and terrible sexual abuse.

How tragic is it that so many Christians define themselves over against those whom they hate and align themselves with those who share the same hatred. Recent longitudinal research by Mason, Wronski and Kane, published by Cambridge University Press, has shown the major reason 81% of white evangelical Christians in the US voted for Trump in 2016 was - they 'were animated by the same animus' towards the same minority groups - they hated the same ethnic, religious and gender minorities whom he hated.<sup>1</sup> And you can find Christians in Oz who hate the same ethnic, religious and gender minorities they hate.



By contrast, they say when the apostle John was an old man, like me, they used to carry him into the church on a stretcher and ask him to preach the gospel to them. And they say that the gospel he preached was simply the gospel of love I am sharing with you today:

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them (1 Jn. 4:18). Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 Jn. 4:7–8). In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us (1 Jn. 4:10). We love because he first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19). Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another (1 Jn. 4:11). How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action (1 Jn. 3:17–18). No one has ever seen God; [but] if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us (1 Jn. 4:12).

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<sup>1</sup> Lilliana Mason, Julie Wronski, John V Kane *Activating Animus: The Uniquely Social Roots of Trump Support* Published online by Cambridge University Press: 30 June 2021



I can remember a time recently when Ange and I met with a bunch of weary, wrinkled, disillusioned activists who had struggled in vain for change in my state since the buoyant days of the anti-Vietnam War Moratorium in the late 60's. Most of them were hard-core atheists, very cynical about the role that religion had played in supporting the status quo, but they had invited Ange and I, as "Godists," to come to their group to share with them about how "God" sustained us in our struggle for justice, in spite of our disillusionment.

After an in-depth session in which we all shared about our disappointments, I asked them if they would permit me to quote a verse of scripture, and they replied saying rather sarcastically: "Sure, man. Preach it." I quoted this verse: "Faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these – greater than faith and greater than hope - is love." I said, the scripture seems to be saying, "if we are disillusioned, and no longer have any faith in the possibility of major change, or any hope that the next revolution won't be another betrayed revolution, but we still have love - and still practice a wholehearted commitment to caring, compassion and a radical concern for the welfare of others - like so many of you do – in the final analysis, that is what matters most."

When I finished saying this, I heard a few people whisper "Amen" and as I looked around the room, I saw there were many people with tears in their eyes. And it seemed to me, they felt that this word, from a "God" whom they didn't believe in, had profoundly affirmed them in being the very best they could be as human beings.



The gospel is simply that 'God is love'(1John 4:8) 'Love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. (v7) 'If we love one another, God lives in us and God's love is made complete in us.'(v12) We are made by love, with love, for love.

Dave Andrews