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Love is scary

To say to someone 'I love you' is not easy for many of us. Some kids wait for years just to hear their dad quietly say to them 'I love you'. There are parents who would give almost anything to have their son or daughter put their arm around them and whisper 'I love you mum'. We all know married couples who just can't remember when they last used these words to each other.

What is the problem? Why is it so hard to get up from the sofa and tell another member of the family that you love them? It is not that the words have become too sentimental. It is usually the opposite. We are scared stiff of declaring our love because we are afraid of the cost. We know deep down that love has a price. If we tell someone that we love them they have the right to expect us to show it. It is much safer to compliment and be kind to each other and to avoid the word love. Declaring our love somehow opens us up and makes us vulnerable.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the story of the love of God. But that love is costly. God is not some irrelevant observer who can't do anything about the real world but sits far off watching with sadness what goes on. Neither is he a cosmic chess player who moves us around like expendable pawns as part of his greater strategy. No – God gets involved. We believe he has come down in the person of his Son and given up his life to the forces of darkness for our good. Ironically it is the cross that demonstrates the love of God. Showing his love meant facing sacrifice, it meant being open and vulnerable, finally it meant death.

This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1John4:9,10)

Hearing someone say they love us is also scary. We can ignore it, pretending we did not hear clearly. Or we can run from it to a safer place where such words are not spoken. Or we can embrace it and be loved unreservedly.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John1:12)