

SERMON

The Very Rev Matt Thompson

Dean of Birmingham

In the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Wasn't that an amazing reading of 1 Corinthians 13. The children of St Thomas', from the All Saints MAT are showing us God's love in action, in a wonderful way. Seeing love in action like that gives me hope and inspiration for these days. One of the privileges of being involved in church school education is that it's a hugely inspirational place to live and to work. Why is it so inspiring, so hopeful?

Let me give you three reasons. As always the first, and best source of inspiration is the awesome children in our church schools. You've already caught a glimpse of them for yourselves in this service. I could take you to anyone of our 51 schools in Birmingham and show you brilliant examples of love in action. I could take you to one of our secondary schools, St Michael's in Rowley Regis to meet the children of 'Student Voice', who are passionate about serving their local community and doing their random acts of kindness. I could take you to the building site of Christchurch Secondary Academy in Yardley wood and share with you the vision of serving the children and families in that neighbourhood. Sarah Smith, our Director of Education will tell you all about this marvellous example of love in action later in this service. I could take you to one of our schools in inner city Nechells, St Matthew's or St Clement's, or to Christchurch Sparkbrook where the children are achieving phenomenally well and reaching out to their neighbours. I could also take you to one of our infant schools, Holly Hill, a joint Methodist and Church of England school, where our youngest learners know all about living out their values, and will tell you exactly what love and kindness means, and what they look like.

My second form of inspiration is the incredible people who work in church school education. Our school leaders, staff and governors. These are the people who have kept our church schools open all through lockdown, don't believe it when you hear that our schools have been closed since March. They have been open throughout with staff working sacrificially, to ensure that our most vulnerable children have been cared for. No Easter or May half term holidays for them.

The doors of their schools kept open, learning platforms built, computer equipment, food parcels and vouchers delivered to the homes of our pupils, and so much more besides. We have so many unsung heroes in our classrooms and in our school offices, not just in Birmingham, but throughout the land. And I'd like to say a few words directly to them now.

It breaks my heart to hear some of the ways in which you have been represented in the media through these days. You and I know that the reality has been very, very different. Our service today is a small way in which we can say a big thank you to God, for you and for all that you have done to show God's love in action throughout these long months.

We give thanks to you, and we salute you for all that you have done. A truly outstanding act of service, to God and to our nation. And we bless you for the new year to come with all its opportunities and challenges.

My third source of inspiration is the work of the Church of England education office, where some of the most exciting work anywhere in the Church of England is currently taking place. They have provided us with the amazing Church of England vision for education. Educating for fullness of life for all, is a magnificent vision and it inspires me and thousands of others to get out of bed everyday and to do our very best, to provide just that for all our learners, children, young people and adults. During the early days of lockdown they worked apace with partners to create Oak Academy, an all round provision of online lessons and examples of good practice for all our teachers and learners; truly inspiring. If you want to see God's love in action, I know of no better place than your local church school, love without action is just words, words about love are all very well, but without action they make us sound like noisy gongs or clanging cymbals. Love in action makes the music of our lives very beautiful indeed.

So if you want to live out your values and show love in action why not reach out to your local church school, pray for the children, staff and governors there. Find out about how they are showing God's love in action in your community and ask how you can join in.

Amen.