

L.C.F. Date: 4th December 2016

Readings: Hebrews 1:1-9 & 1Jn.4:7-16

Preacher: Rev. Adrian Hallett

Title: “Christmas – A Love Story”

All of us – most of us – like a good love story...I have a wife who loves a good love story...romantic novels...romantic films...romantic period dramas on TV...'Pride & Prejudice' in particular...I know she's not alone...you ladies love a good love story!

I don't think it's just the ladies either – if we were honest guys, we quite enjoy them too!

There is one kind of love story that is ever popular... written in different ways but the basic plot is the same..the sort of story that starts off badly...

The man is keen on her...has fallen head over heels in love with her...he seeks to win her over...but....she is cool towards him...indifferent even to his advances...his advances towards her are frustrated...she turns him down – several times

But our handsome hero won't give up... he is determined that she will be his... he's very determined...persistent in his advances towards her...but she will have none of it.... she's heard things about him...could never commit to him... it seems as though the relationship is doomed to failure...but then she learns something more about him...

She begins to see him in a new light...becomes aware that she had misjudged him....she's been hasty and impetuous... she now sees his true worth....she realises that she was wrong about him and his past...her resistance crumbles...she's desperate for him to resume his advances towards her.. longs for them to meet... Will it happen or is it too late? No, its not too late....he arranges to call unannounced...they look into each others eyes.... fall into each others arms – and live happily ever after!

That's the basic story line that is very popular...there is a particular pattern to that kind of love story – you probably spotted it....Persistence...Resistance...& Acceptance... the essential ingredients of a classic love story/romantic novel.

Now you might be thinking, 'What has this got to do with anything?' What is Adrian on about – the vicar's going soft and all romantic....he's losing the plot!

Well, here we are, with two more Sundays to go before Christmas....a chance to think about the real meaning of Christmas..... a chance to prepare... a chance to step aside from all the hustle and bustle of Christmas and remind ourselves of what it's really all about.

Quite simply, Christmas, whatever else you may think it is, is essentially a love story...a classic love story...a love story to end all love stories...a love story with those classic ingredients of Persistence – Resistance and Acceptance

We see the persistence of God in Hebrews 1, we see the resistance of man in John 1 and then acceptance, again in that same chapter. So let's now look at those classic ingredients in our love story.

1) PERSISTENCE:

In any love story it is essential for one party to take the initiative...for any love story to get started one party has to start the communication process....somebody has to say something....

Illustration: My first 'girlfriend' – a love story that never got off the ground...I was so shy and tongue tied that I could hardly communicate...not surprisingly our romance never blossomed...it just sort of fizzled out... to be honest, it never got started!

That's where our reading in Hebrew 1 comes in...that reading makes it very clear that lack of communication in our Christmas love story was never an issue...quite the contrary...

Hebrews 1 makes it abundantly clear that God is a God who communicates...he is a God who has persistently communicated....He is a God who speaks... God taken the initiative...This God has always spoken...

In God taking the initiative... His communication was no empty gesture...this was no half-hearted attempt... verse 1 '*God spoke....through the prophets at many times and in various ways...*'

He spoke '*many times...*' He spoke through the prophets at different stages of Israel's history.... down through the ages.... down the centuries....constantly communicating...persistent in his warnings...repeatedly encouraging his people...declaring his love and commitment to his people.

He spoke '*many times ...*' he spoke through the major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel...he spoke through the twelve minor prophets....he used the prophets over and over again to communicate with his people...he used for example, Amos to convey his justice...he used Isaiah to convey his holiness...he used Hosea to convey his unfailing, forgiving love...he spoke 'many times'... he spoke over and over

again... he was persistent.

And he also spoke in '*various ways*'... for example, he spoke through voices to Samuel...he spoke through visions to Isaiah...he spoke through a still small voice to Elijah...he spoke through the weeping compassion of Jeremiah... he spoke through drought and pestilence... he spoke through bountiful harvests...he spoke through freedom from exile... he spoke through the law...through Judges...through poet's and prophet...

Are we getting the message? God was persistent... he never gave up... he never relented. 'God has spoken through the prophets at many times and in various ways'. God was active and involved with his people... doing all he could to draw those he loved so much back to himself... he did all he could to show his love for his people.

But his people were deaf to those advances...they went after other 'lovers'...they refused to listen to him... they constantly doubted his words... they rejected him and his advances.

Even after all that, God didn't give up in our love story....this God is a persistent God...he tries again to win over his people...Verse 2 '*but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son...*'

Note that, 'he has spoken...' the tense of the verb describes an action in its entirety...something total and complete....the full character of God revealed through Jesus Christ. He 'has spoken'..it's complete so it's also his *last* word.. if it is total and complete there's nothing more to come... nothing more to follow. This is it! Take note! There is no point in looking or hoping for more...this is his last word.

Have you noticed how precious are words from a loved one? Especially if it turns out to be his or her last words. What he or she said before they died is always remembered...always treasured....often memorised to allow the memories to come flooding back...

That is how we should regard God's word to us...his last word.... therefore we should treasure his word.... remember his word....memorise his word....it should be everything to us....because there is one huge difference with God's last word to us... it's not a dead word....it's not a word from someone no longer with us...it's a living word... it's a dynamic word...it's a life changing word... written by a God who is alive and still speaks to us today through that living word.

What I'm saying here is that the writer to the Hebrews makes it abundantly clear... God's attitude toward us in this love story can be summed up in one word – Persistence!

2) RESISTANCE:

But if God is persistent, man's attitude can be summed up in another word – resistant! We see that in the well known Christmas reading of John 1 which we will have in our Carol Service in two weeks time ...

Firstly, he came to his people... God's chosen people...his people to whom he had spoken *'through the prophets at many times and in various ways'*

A people who should have been prepared... a people who should have welcomed Jesus with open arms...

But they were neither receptive nor responsive... they were resistant....they refused to respond to God's word...their hearts were hard... their ears were deaf...they were responding to the advances of God in the same old way.... in the way they had always done... nothing had changed.... they were as resistant as ever.

Jesus should have been welcomed...he was in one sense coming home...*'He came to that which was his own'* can be translated, as it is in the RV, *'He came to his own home'*... in other words, he didn't come as a stranger.... he didn't come as some sort of 'alien'...he came to his people.... he came to his people Israel... he came 'home'!

He came to his people... he came to his own.... his people who enjoyed many privileges.... his people who had all the spiritual advantages.... but they were, tragically, a people who did not recognise him... who did not receive him... who did not welcome him....they were opposed to him... they resisted – again – yet another advance that God made towards them in our love story....

They chose to believe lies about him.... refused to believe that what he said was true...they convinced themselves that he did not have their best interests at heart...they looked elsewhere for the love and security they craved.... they resisted his every advance...

Still the same today... it's been the same in every generation... think about Jesus on the cross... arms outstretched.... seeking to draw us to himself.... gathering a people to himself....dying, literally, to save us from hell... loving us to the very end... but people stand there... untouched and unmoved.... resisting him still... pushing him away.... immune to even this advance....*'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins.'* (1John 4:10). That's love.... that's an unbelievable love story....God giving himself – even for us, even though we spurn him... ridicule him... blaspheme his name... dismiss him as irrelevant...

3) ACCEPTANCE:

If our love story ended there it would be a rather sad ending....persistence meeting

only resistance.. but thankfully it doesn't end there...there is also acceptance... not with all, sadly, but with some...'Yet to all who received him...' there were some who received him... there were some who accepted his advances....some who responded positively to his love...

Those who at one time had a wrong understanding of God...those who doubted his motives... those who decided to go there own way and do there own thing...they reflected on him and his advances down the ages.... began to see the truth about this loving God.... those who then came to there senses.... who turned away from their hardness of heart.... their resistance crumbled in the light of his persistent love...they responded to his advances.... they '*believed in his name*'... and this loving God gave to those who accepted his advances, '*the right to become children of God*'....adopted by grace into the family of God.

There is our happy ending...persistent love conquers all... persistent love breaks down resistant hearts leading ultimately to acceptance. What a love story.... the greatest love story ever...as we reflect on the meaning of Christmas ourselves, let us marvel at the persistent advances of this loving God... repent, if we haven't already done so, of our resistance...and then praise and worship him that his persistent love brought even you and me (I trust?) to acceptance.