

Jesus' questioning of Peter towards the end of the gospel today is not found anywhere else but in John – and, as he frequently does, John is using a small, apparently ordinary incident to present a profound and extraordinary meditation. Here, it is on the nature of love: not Peter's love for Jesus, but divine love.

When we say 'God loves us' we mean that God *is* love. God is not a verb. The love that is God is so deep and immeasurable that we can never understand it: It can touch our hearts in astonishing ways, but it can't be touched by our minds. The love that is God can only be faintly suggested in metaphor. The scriptures use many metaphors: like a mother's love for her child, a marriage between husband and wife, the deep affection there can be between friends and, in Jesus's own words, the protective love of a hen for her chicks. But in the end all metaphors are inadequate. There can be nothing outside or beyond it. It is all there is. It also the smallest thing there is, because particle physicists tell us that sub-atomic particles from protons to quarks are held in their perpetual dance by a power that others might call God.

Every being, from an ant to a starburst – and absolutely every human person – is held within the love of God. Everything that exists is loved not because of who or what it is, but simply *because* it is. To be – to exist – is to be loved. You are loved not because you are good, bad or indifferent, but just because you are. Love causes you to be and love's what it has caused. You are the effect of love, as light and

heat is the effect of the sun. This isn't some fanciful thinking, because Jesus taught it to us in Chapter 5 of Matthew's gospel when he said: "Therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect; for he sends his rain on good and bad people alike, and makes his sun shine on the just and the unjust equally."

When God – however we conceive God to be – looks at the ant or the starburst or the human person, he says: 'I love only you. I call only you. I whisper only to you. There is only you and me.' Every time he says this to a thousand million beings, it is always and every time true, because God sees only one. When he looks at you he sees the ant and the starburst and the thousand million beings at the same time. Our lifelong experience of manyness and separation, of competition and conflict, is a lie. But we don't have to be nervous or afraid: we're not lost in this oneness of God's gaze, we're not absorbed or fused and we do not for a moment lose our unique individual self, because what God who is love, has brought into being, he does not wipe away. God never has second thoughts. Buddhists call it a 'not-twoness' – which is a good attempt to put into words something that goes utterly beyond all words.

A modern spiritual writer has put it this way:

"A soft whisper of energy seemed to emerge from the stillness. It was like a tiny flame, one that could be easily overlooked but was eternally present. Like a moth drawn to light I followed it, until the idea of myself — of me,

the individual person I thought of as me — began to melt away. No words can adequately describe this experience. I felt overwhelmingly whole, as if I was part of something that extended well beyond the conscious plane of existence. I went deeper and deeper... until I sensed the presence of the countenance of God.

“For the first time in my life I felt completely and unconditionally accepted. There was nothing that could break this bond. I didn’t need to ‘become’ anything or ‘prove’ my worth; I was already complete and whole.”