

9<sup>th</sup> January 2023

## Agape

**"Agape is something of the understanding, creative, goodwill for all ...  
It is a love that seeks nothing in return ... You have *agape* in your soul."**

Martin Luther King,

*"Loving Your Enemies", Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama (1957)*

When I was young, my Sundays centred around church and family: morning worship and Sunday School; an afternoon walk; evening worship; and family time before bed. Worship on Sunday mornings was typically Presbyterian in style, black, brooding and boring for a small boy. Communion was celebrated twice a year – and eventually (more radically) four times a year – and was part of a "Communion Season": a Friday evening "Preparatory Service" (which still happens in some of the Island communities, in some places the "Preparatory Season" being *every* evening during the week before Communion); the "Big Communion" on the Sunday morning; and a "Thanksgiving Service" on the Sunday evening. Little children were *not* permitted at Communion, and it wasn't till I was a teenager that I had any idea what Communion was about at all. It was dull too, and *all* about having to be "good enough" – and I knew I wasn't.

That changed at the concluding worship of the Scottish Christian Youth Assembly in the early 1970s, in what was then St John's Highland Tolbooth Church, now the Edinburgh Festival *Hub*. A fresh-faced student, I was playing guitar in the band for a huge gathering of young people. The worship leader, a young, trainee minister who became a good friend, offered what was for me an extraordinary, and revelatory, act of worship, including inviting the end person in each row to come to the Communion table, take a slice of bread back to their area, and share it with others. It was, the worship-leader said, *An Agape*, a sign of our love for one another. And in that single action, love became the true centre of our sharing. Gone was the dullness of a brooding, uninviting, black, restrictive Presbyterian Communion. Here was light, love and learning for a young man.

Today, I pay tribute to the moment that minister created for me, the insight he gave and the beauty and wonder that's never left me. And I thank God that, from that day to this, remembering a slice of bread shared with friends in worship, I still have Martin Luther King's "*agape* in my soul."

### A prayer for today

*Agape ... Love seeking nothing in return. How creative might that make us? Amen*

*An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon*

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