There is a sermon from our Gospel reading this morning about the world: being in the world or out of the world, being sent to the world, being separated from the world. What is meant by the world here? I’m not going to preach that sermon. I want to go further back and into the very heart of God. For our reading is part of a prayer by Jesus himself to the Father; Jesus who states in the prayer that he and the Father are one and asks that we might be one also – one in him. So this prayer is God speaking to God through God. We are interlopers; we are overhearing a prayer within God’s very own being. For this isn’t spoken to us and to the disciples; though it is spoken for us and for the disciples.

Jesus is intentionally speaking that he might be overheard; the inner dialogue between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is beyond words; locked into an eternal pregnant and impregnating silence. So this is spoken, accommodated to human language, that we might be given a glimpse into the inter-communion between Father and Son through the Spirit, and tune into the concern in that inter-communion.

The concern, the whole inner conversation goes right back to John 3.16: “God so loved the world.” This is the interior dynamic of that prayer; its deep intention, its deep motivation, its deep expression. It is from this that there is a sending into the world, of Christ, the Son – God from God, Light from Light. We, and the disciples, are listening to a divine inner-dialogue throughout this prayer: of love speaking to love in love of love. It’s about love and consecration that I want to talk this morning.

Have you ever experienced overhearing someone’s conversation with another person; a conversation not intended for you at all? It happens very frequently now because of mobile phones being used in public places. Sometimes on a train I am utterly dumbfounded by the way people speak so loudly into their phones as if there was no one around but themselves. I suppose I grew up used to telephones in which thick red doors
of caste iron and panes of thick glass ensured privacy. The public telephones of a generation ago. But I recall my sister-in-law visiting from London and arriving by train one night in a state of some distress. She had been sitting across from a man using his mobile first to inform his wife that he was at the airport and had to leave immediately for a two day trip to Brussels on business. And then she listened to him informing someone else that he would meet them that evening in the lobby of a hotel in Bristol. Why was she distressed? In her words, “I felt complicit.” She felt guilty, even soiled, by actually witnessing this deception and being unable to do anything about it. Somehow, when we overhear a conversation, even though it is not intended for our hearing, we participate in it as a witness. We participate in what is being communicated. This is even more so when we are the subject of the conversation, and overhear by accident.

Listening to that prayer by Jesus read to us this morning from the Gospel we overhear, and we are meant to overhear, something about God’s inner personhood. We are not excluded from this prayer, as my sister-in-law was excluded from that man’s conversations on the train. So the effect of being involved and being implicated is all the greater. We are drawn into the inner workings of divine love; a love that concerns us; a love that includes us and includes the world because God so loved that world that the Son was sent. And here the Son is, drawing us to himself and into the depths of the Godhead.

Sometimes I picture love as a walk into the deep. Let’s make this simple: two people standing on the shore of a lake, all the possibilities for the love between them lie out there in the water because there is no end to the depth to which love can go. God’s love is infinitely infinite. The two people, drawn to each other enter the waters, but the question is how deep will they allow themselves to go. How deep can their relationship with each other go? Will they paddle playful in the shallows or plumb deeper into waters where the bottom can’t be seen. Of course, in human relationships we can move from one to the other. But some relationships just cannot bear those depths of love where feet no longer touch the bottom, and the currents are colder and the water is darker because more profound.

In our relationship to God something of this analogy holds, only we are drawn out endlessly towards depthless depths in which Christ alone can sustain and hold us. The work of faith is nothing more and nothing less than the work of love. It is not an act of the mind or an act of will. It’s a surrender and entrustment. It is being drawn into
currents and waters where our feet no longer touch the bottom and our eyes no longer can see the bottom.

We are drawn into the inner workings of the triune God that this intimate prayer by Jesus to the Father in our Gospel reading this morning expresses. And it is in this way that we, like Jesus, are in the world but not of the world. Because the world is where my feet touch the ground, and I think I know what I’m doing. The world is where there are wars and rumours of wars, rampant injustice and cycles of violence, oppression and deprivation that cannot be broken because it’s the outworking of sin.

And we can’t solve, dissolve or resolve sin; we cannot only be saved from its perniciousness – saved by that divine love that “so loved the world” even in its sinfulness that the Son was sent that whosoever believed in him would have eternal life. Jesus Christ gave himself in love, for love because love is the very essence and inner motivation of God. This is the tenor and tone of the intimate conversation we overhear in Jesus’s prayer – that all things in heaven and on earth may be made one, may be reconciled, in him. So Jesus consecrated himself – that consecration in love in action and extension. Love consecrates. So Jesus consecrated himself that we might consecrate ourselves in this same work; that we might be sent in his name and sustained by his grace, in this world. And love. It’s as simple and profound as that: that we might love as God loves.