

Pastor's Message – 1/30/2022  
1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Ah, love! February is the month of love. Love is the subject of countless books and tear-jerker songs. Love – the thing that has motivated heroic action as well as dastardly deeds. There are countless songs, movies, novels, and poems that exalt love's virtue. Even the U.S. Post Office gets into the spirit by offering "Love" stamps which appeared on our newsletters this weekend.

I feel rather inadequate in even trying to comment on such a great theme of which Paul writes in his Letter to the Corinthians today. I know that I have not always been as loving as I could have been. There have been times when I have not been sure what love would have done or what love is. So, perhaps we could work on it together by coming up with some definitions of love. How would you define love . . . ?

If people recognize 1 Corinthians 13, they know it as the love chapter. Many people think of it as the wedding chapter, having so often heard it read at weddings. A wedding, however, is not this passage's original setting.

1 Corinthians 13 might be better described, actually, as the church fight chapter. This is the second Sunday on which we have read from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. He has been writing about the gifts that are given to each person in the church for the good of the church. The 13<sup>th</sup> chapter is about gifts too, given by God, as well for the good of the church.

You may know that, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul is responding to a long list of questions and problems faced by this early faith community: the new church at the Greek city of Corinth. Paul is writing to give advice over specific arguments that the church at Corinth is having. They even attack Paul at several points. This church might even be described as *"The Troubled Church of Stumbling over and Arguing about One Problem Right after Another."* These folks are having a hard time figuring out how to get along with one another.

So in chapter 13, Paul makes the case that love is essential to a harmonious life in community. In chapter 13, he uses a substantial list of verbs to describe what love is and what love is not. I thought it might be helpful to dig into Paul's suggestions instead of just reading them through, so I've printed out a worksheet on an insert in your bulletin today. Let's take some time to write down exactly what kind of advice Paul is giving. Let's look at what Paul says love is and what love is not:

## Worksheet

**Love is/is not**

<b>Love is...</b>	<b>Love is not/does not...</b>
v. 4	
v. 4	
	v. 4
	v. 4
	v. 4
	v. 5
	v. 5
	v. 5
	v. 5
	v. 6
v. 6	
v. 7	

In a sense, this chapter represents Paul's attempt to describe the governing rule for Christian life. In Jesus' day, the Jewish faith had become a religion saturated with regulations and ceremonial requirements. There were so many, in fact, that they were almost impossible to keep track of, let alone fulfill. The only folks who even came close were the Pharisees and scribes, and that was only because they were the ones chiefly responsible for this complex system in the first place. They spent hours carefully dissecting the Mosaic code -- adding amendments, quibbling over exemptions, tinkering with the fine print -- until whatever life was still stirring within the law had all but suffocated in the dense smoke of legalese.

Jesus, on the other hand, saw the law quite differently. It wasn't that he wanted to throw all of the rules out the window. He simply wanted to open a window so that the spirit of the law could breathe again. According to Jesus, the supreme requirement is that we love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds, and our neighbors as ourselves. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" is how he put it to the Pharisees (Matthew 22:40). A little later, when he was alone with his disciples, he narrows the focus even further by telling them, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). The implication being that the only law they really need to keep track of is the Law of Love. If they obey that, they will already be on track in terms of keeping the rest of it.

Love is the one thing, above all else, which Jesus requires of us as disciples, and thus it is the primary characteristic of our faith. If someone were to inquire, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" I don't think you can find a better answer than to say, "It means that we love one another." And if by chance there would be the follow-up question, "What does it mean to love one another?" you can find no better example than the life of Jesus. He did more than merely tell us to love our neighbors; he also taught us how. His intent, it seems, was to move us to the point where we finally love everybody we meet - including those we just met and even those we wish we never had.

But while Jesus clearly demonstrated love for us, he never actually defines it in so many words. Paul can help us. Let's read a portion of the text once more and this time insert the name of Christ in the place of love:

JESUS is patient and kind;

JESUS is not jealous or boastful. He is not proud or rude.

JESUS does not demand his own way. He is not irritable nor does He keep a record of being wronged. He does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.

JESUS never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

If we are going to be followers of Jesus, imitators of Jesus, we can insert ourselves in place of Christ. As a follower of Jesus, I am called to be . . .

. . . patient and kind

. . . neither jealous nor boastful nor proud nor rude

I do not insist on my own way. I am not irritable nor do I keep a record of being wronged. I do not rejoice about injustice but rejoice whenever the truth wins out.

I never give up, never lose faith, am always hopeful, and endure through every circumstance.

Like I said before, commenting on this chapter 13 of Paul's Letter to the Corinthians is daunting and humbling. Living it out is even harder. There are so many things in life that get in the way of knowing just what to do and how to act and say in all the situations that life throws at us. It is easy to get distracted. But God tells us through Paul and his Letter to the Corinthians that the top three things in life are faith, hope, and love: three things for us to focus on.

Faith in God means we trust God as the Lord of our life. God is at work in every moment of our lives.

Faith means we believe that Jesus is our Savior and in and through Him we can come to God.

Jesus said that even if our faith is the size of a mustard seed, God can do awesome things!

Hope is a gift that God puts in our hearts. We look forward to God's faithfulness and help.

A small amount of hope, even a flicker in our heart, is powerful and propels us to go forward.

But as important as faith and hope are, love is absolutely essential.

God's love for us and our love for God last forever!

The best way to show God's love is to be kind.

There is conflict in our country. There is conflict between nations. There is conflict between churches and the "Conference." There is conflict within our Conference. There is conflict in the larger United Methodist Church. Paul was writing to the Corinthians in the midst of their conflict. Perhaps Paul is writing to us too.