

January 30, 2022

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

“It’s About Love”

Today is one of those days where the text read for us holds an embarrassment of riches. *Where are we supposed to start?* That is one of the problems, I suppose, of reading this text at weddings. If you comb through the text and look at all that this love is – and all it is not – *how on earth can anyone live up to it?*

Indeed, it is as if the two getting married aren’t ordinary people with *faults, annoying habits, and stubbornness to boot!* You know we all fit that profile. So, how are we to think about this passage which sets impossible standards that has been read at far too many weddings?

The most helpful thing to consider here is that though we read this description about love at weddings, Paul didn’t write it for weddings. Paul wrote about love while ***discussing how we are to understand and share our gifts as people who belong to a community of faith***...you know...people who have *faults, annoying habits and stubbornness to boot!* So, we move the conversation from how does any marriage last to how does any community of faith thrive? I’m not sure that’s an improvement.

One of the most helpful things we can discover in trying to understand Biblical passages is that what we often read as “*prescriptive*” passages may turn out to be “*descriptive*” passages. We read about the love of God and despair. If this is what God’s love is like *how will we ever measure up?* That’s the prescriptive reading. But what if we read the passage instead as Paul telling us *what he sees when the love of God is present in community* – describing it so we will know it when we see it?

For example, that old bane *patience* is mentioned more than once in describing what lived love looks like. And in each case, it is a *description* of what love looks like – both for *those who have power* to retaliate and *those who don’t*. When we have power, Paul says love is present when we don’t hit back just because we can. Which sounds like Jesus really. And later in the passage Paul uses the word for patience *which describes* someone who is *long suffering* because they have no choice...but they don’t let it crush and overwhelm *them because love animates their lives*. Love is when we treat other people well – when we don’t have to.

And love is when we endure circumstances we can't change *without letting them define us.*

Paul says **love doesn't keep a record of wrongs.** And if we want to be a good friend or stay married, we will listen to him. But does that mean we don't remember bad things at all? This past week we had "*Holocaust Remembrance Day.*" The reason we have the day is to remember something awful and horrifying which we don't ever want to see happen again. So, what is the difference between *not keeping a record of wrongs* and *pretending the past has been sunshine and roses* without any negative lessons to teach us?

I personally was shocked to see Americans carrying Nazi flags in demonstrations in Charlottesville, Virginia. How many Americans died fighting and defeating the Nazis? Too many. And here are people who have long since forgotten what those symbols mean and stand for carrying them as if they had a place in our society.

Love does not keep a record of wrongs. But love does not baptize wickedness and call it good either. Love, it turns out, may not be as simple as we thought.

And yet, love promises us something *many of us thought we might never have* - maturity. What do you want to be when you grow up? I am still pondering that question. But Paul promises us relief from the agony of self-centered existence because *living in God's love we will know as we are known.* We will grow into those who can know God who has always known and loved us. It is a promise of maturity rooted in relationship – *our relationship with the one who loves us best helps us to embody the love we can grow in to.*

If we remember anything from this fire hose of a passage perhaps it can be, "Love is *patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant⁵ or rude.* ...Love never ends."

Love never ends. "*It's about love, love, love – that's what its all about.* Cause God loves us we love each other – mother, father, sister, brother...everybody sing and shout! Cause that's what its all about. It's about love – love – love.