

The Way of Love
The United Church of Broomfield
Rev. Michael R. Blackwood
March 27, 2022

1 Corinthians 13 (The Message)

¹ If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

² If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

³⁻⁷ If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,

Doesn't have a swelled head,

Doesn't force itself on others,

Isn't always "me first,"

Doesn't fly off the handle,

Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn't revel when others grovel,

Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,

Puts up with anything,

Trusts God always,

Always looks for the best,

Never looks back,

But keeps going to the end.

⁸⁻¹⁰ Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

¹¹ When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

¹² We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing God directly just as They knows us!

¹³ But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

Today's passage is about love. Ah, love. We've taken Paul's letter to the Corinthians and very often make it a focal point for marriage ceremonies and anniversaries – you know, marital love. And while this is ok, we mustn't forget the reason behind Paul's writing of these words. Paul wasn't writing to the Corinthians to give them marital counseling and advice. He wasn't waxing eloquently about loving a spouse or partner. He was writing to a church that was in crisis. When the church in Corinth began it was diverse and everyone was passionate and committed to living the way of Jesus. It grew and thrived ... but with time, the church – its people - encountered challenges and struggles, and it began to fall apart. People began to revert to old patterns and habits, honoring rich over the poor, the religiously gifted over those gifted differently, the

educated over the illiterate, men over women, and adults over children. When the church began, they valued and celebrated diversity, - each person was valued for their uniqueness, each one's gifts celebrated as they contributed to the whole. But then, with the tensions of life, their differences became problems.

To the Corinthians, Paul speaks about love as an expression of commitment to a life in community – valuing each person and the gifts that they bring, for everyone has gifts from God. In community, everyone is family. It is no longer a matter of biology that binds them together. The way of Jesus is one of community, church, and communion. All of creation is interconnected in various webs of community; small, large, overlapping and expansive. This is the grand, magnanimous, indescribable, complex and uncontainable love of which Paul speaks.

Love is patient and gentle. But the Corinthians were exhibiting anything but – envy, boasting, arrogance, selfishness, irritability, resentfulness, and rudeness. Paul wrote to them, reminding that of this – what you're doing is NOT the love of Christ. God called them, and us, to a better way; the way of Christ. A way that is centered in love and results in unity while respecting differences; a way that sees in the other a kinship that transcends familiar boundaries; a way that serves others from a place of love; a way that values others for who and what they are. A way that is about faith and hope and love.

Howard Thurman grew up during the early 1900s in Dayton, Florida, where educational opportunities for Blacks were limited. There were only three high schools for Blacks in the entire state. The closest private church-related high school was in Jacksonville, about 90 miles away. His community pooled their resources to send him to further his education.

At the train station, Thursday learned that he would have to pay extra to ship his rope-tied trunk, and he did not have the money. Alone and dejected, he sat on the steps of the rail stations. A stranger, a Black man, asked why he was crying. After Thurman explained his situation, the man paid the extra fare. Before Thurman could thank him, the man walked away, and Thurman never saw him again. The dedication to Thurman's autobiography reads, *"To the stranger in the railroad station in Daytona Beach who restored my broken dream sixty-five years ago."*

Thurman went on to become a renowned scholar and theologian and influenced the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr. The stranger saw a young man in despair and his generosity made a difference – he expected nothing in return; he just saw a need and responded. The man may or may not have thought of his gift as an act of love, but it changed the trajectory of Thurman's life.

Last year there was a human-interest story out of Cleveland, OH about a woman named Sharon Johnson. Ms. Johnson was once homeless and lived in an abusive relationship. Trying to escape that life, she and her two sons fled and were living in a hotel. She frequented the local public library to use their computers so she could apply for jobs and find employment. One day she was sitting next to a woman at the computer terminals and randomly handed her a fresh flower she had picked from outside and a butterfly decal to put on her phone. It was just a simply kind act that Ms. Johnson felt like doing. The next day when Ms. Johnson returned to the library, that same woman was there and shared with Ms. Johnson that she had been contemplating suicide and was going to go through with it...until Ms. Johnson's loving gesture.

Ms. Johnson's action – a gesture to simply be nice to someone else – saved a life. Ms. Johnson took that moment as a sign from God, and she committed herself to living a life devoted to sharing acts of love and kindness with others. Ms. Johnson began a non-profit organization called, "Never Give Up, Never Quit," which has vans emblazoned with the organization's logo that drive around cities and towns around the United States and give away bus passes, grocery store & restaurant gift cards, clothing items, fresh flowers, and handcrafted, homemade gifts like soaps and keychains. They typically go to low-income areas, park, open the van doors and start giving away items and talking with people. These selfless gifts are simple and basic – but they most certainly affect lives.

The recipients of such loving gestures often go on to do great things, small and grand. They also influence others - and by living the Way taught to us by Jesus, affect countless people for generations. Unselfish, benevolent acts of kindness, pledges of financial support, and gifts of compassion – like those we collected today as part of One Great Hour of Sharing – restore broken dreams, resurrect hope, and carve a path into the future.

In our church, in our lives – what does love look like like?

"Psychologist Harry Stack Sullivan maintains that "love begins when a person feels another person's need to be as important as his own." Frankly, life itself begins when a person feels another person's need is as important as his own. From the beginning of the Bible, the emphasis is on community. Adam is not complete without someone to love. The Lord God said, "It is not good that a man should be alone; I will make another who completes him." Adam alone is nothing; he does not even exist as a human apart from Eve. And Eve does not exist as a complete person apart from helping Adam. The helping of another person is what makes us human. Paul hammered home the point to the Corinthians: "Without love, I am nothing. Without charity I am nothing at all." Without love, regardless of my money, regardless of my power, regardless of my education, I am meaningless. Life has no meaning for me. I am dissatisfied, lonely, unfulfilled, and miserable."¹

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we've regularly been reassuring ourselves that "we will get through this – together." That's what love looks like – our willingness to share resources to make the way easier for other. Our motivation to sacrifice of ourselves for the betterment of others. Our patience to endure great inconveniences and even minor ones. Our readiness to give more, to not give up and to offer hope, kindness and care – here and beyond our church doors. Agape is love that is rooted in concrete acts of compassion: helping others to rebuild after hurricanes and tornadoes; donating our money and time to charitable organizations, teaching others to fish, rather than just handing them some food; providing skills and equipping dignity; and yes, even just handing someone a flower.

Acts of love take many forms, so remember it's now how you love, but that you love.

Through all kinds of weather, and even in the unknown, love remains – and love lived in community transforms the world. That is the foundation of our church's proclamation - #rooted in love, #rooted in faith, #rooted in community. Through our giving we help rebuild, renew and restore. Through whatever comes our ways – love remains.

AMEN

¹ Warlick, Harold. "Old Favorite." [You Have Mail from God.](#)