



“No Ordinary Sunday: Love Conquers All

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
8:30 & 10:45 a.m. Sunday, January 31, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Psalms 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

Grace and peace be to you from God Our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A long married husband and wife at the twilight of their life together was talking and the husband said, “Mary! Do you remember 60 years ago when we got married and I started that business and we lost all of our money and we became destitute, and you didn't leave me? Why was that? Mary.” And Mary said, “Because I loved you.” And he went on to say, “Remember a few years later, when we started another business and my partner ran off with all the money and left us nothing? Why did you stay with me?” Mary said, “Because I loved you.” And he said, “Do you remember how I clawed my way back to the top and we had a nice house, but then a fire happened and it destroyed everything because I hadn't paid the insurance. We lost everything, but you were still there through it all, weren't you Mary?” And Mary said, “It's because I love you.” And the man said, “But Mary, we came back didn't we? We came back and I made lots of money, and it was all good until I got arrested for tax evasion and spent five years in jail, and you were there when I got out.” And Mary said, “It's because I love you.” The tears welled up in the man's eyes and he looked at her and he said, “Mary, Mary, you've been bad luck ever since I've known you!!!”

Ahh, love!

This week we're continuing our series on “No Ordinary Sunday,” and today we're looking at how love can conquer everything, love can conquer all.

We have a really wonderful passage of scripture to talk about that. The passage from 1 Corinthians. Now most of us have probably heard this passage before when we've gone to, well pretty much any wedding, it seems to be the favorite for weddings. And it is almost chosen for weddings like it's almost a detached poem. It's so well known that sometimes we forget that it is in the context of this first letter of Paul to the Corinthian people. It's a great passage, it's a great letter for weddings, but it is really, really important for all of us to remember the context in which this particular passage is written.

On the one level we just love it because it's all about love you know, love, love, love, that's great. We love love don't we? But in this particular context it's important to understand who Paul is writing to. You see the Corinthians were a cantankerous bunch. What's interesting about this passage is the fact is that they really didn't love each

other. Quite the opposite. They had all sorts of groups that had their own agenda, all sorts of fractures within the congregation. Imagine for us getting together the candidates who are running for president both republican and democrat and throwing them in the same room and saying "get along guys." That's what the Corinthian church looked like. But we understand all too well that sort of divisiveness. We can see it happen in the community and we can even see it happen in a congregation.

Think of all of those issues over the last say 200 years that have polarized congregations; race, economics, politics. What sort of ministry we should have, hymn books, renovations. Believe me there are lots of things for us to get our ire about. And it's in our human nature to choose sides, and then to get ready to fight it out.

But what Paul is saying to the Corinthians is, there's something even more important than that. It's the need to work together. And so, what he decides to do is he shows them these virtues that every Christian should have at the top of their mind as they seek to live a Christian life.

Virtues like faith, hope, and love. And Paul says, that the greatest of those gifts is love, the greatest virtue is love. See Paul believes that "love" is essential to Christian living, especially for a congregation. Because in a congregation, we make a decision to live in community with one another. We share our worship, we share our resources, we share our prayers with one another. St. Paul would say, Love is the key to understanding what a whole life in community is meant to be. It is required, he would say.

Now for us who are English speakers, this passage can be a little difficult for us because in English we really don't use that many words for love. We tend to use the same word. So it can cause all sorts of problems. Let me illustrate. I can say to you brothers and sisters I want you to know I love you. And you can look at that and say isn't that nice, our pastor loves us. But if I went up to some of you individually and I looked at you and I said, "Hey, (wink, wink) I want you to know, I love you." That will have a completely different reaction.

But it is the same word. See, Paul here is not talking about romantic love like we have in Hollywood, nor is he saying well this is just saying I love hiking. We just kind of have an affection for it. It's related, but it's much, much deeper than that. The word that Paul's using here is the Greek word *Agape*, and there it's talking about a deeply communal love that a brother and a sister in Christ would have for one another. In the Greek they separate all of the different words for love. But for us sometimes it can be confusing because we wonder what exactly we are talking about here. Maybe you've been in that situation.

That's so important for us to understand the distinction because Paul is saying this kind of love is so important for us to maintain the communal bounds for one another, to hold each other together.

Brian Peterson, from Southern Seminary says, "Without love, it does not matter what budgets, buildings, or missional strategies we have. Such things cannot give the church the shape that God desires. We may pursue various forms of spirituality, or proper

doctrine, or activism in the name of justice. However, in our pursuit of these otherwise fine things, we must not forget that the church is called to be a community that practices love."

And this is so important to Paul that he uses sixteen verbs to describe what love is and what love isn't. Seven he uses to describe what it is and nine he uses for what it is not. Let me refresh what we read.

Love is patient.

Love is kind.

Love is not envious. It's not boastful or arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way;

It is not irritable

It is not resentful;

It does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things,

Believes all things,

Hopes all things,

Endures all things.

This is the character of Christian love that you and I are called to. It is important for us to remember that every time we want to get angry, or confrontational, or overly pious or judgmental toward another brother or sister.

Paul would say those things probably need to go away! Because the love that Paul is talking about here is the love that has a future. And there are even some good things that are going to go away because of this type of love.

Paul says, prophecy, the ability to be able to talk, to understand the future. What need do you have of that if the future belongs to God? Or special spiritual utterance, be able to speak a language that you and God understand, what need is that when we are all in heaven worshiping and celebrating his presence? And what about knowledge? It's good to have knowledge about the faith, but do you need even knowledge if you in the very presence of God and your brothers and sisters in heaven?

Those things, Paul says, will ultimately come to an end, except love. Love, love of God, love of neighbor, love lasts forever because it is in the very nature of God. Because God is love. And this is what God cares about, and this is what will last in your life and my life.

Love will conquer all!

Amen

In the name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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