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September 24th, 2024

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13

Sermon Title: The Definition of Love

Prayer...

Introduction:

In this sermon series on peace and love we have explored how the definition of God is love from 1 John 4: 8 and we also reflected on Jesus' love for his disciples. Jesus calls his disciples friends in John chapter 15 and also looks upon us his current followers as his friends. This morning we are exploring the definition of love from 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Corinthians 13 is a text often used in weddings. My wife Karen and I twenty three years ago had this Scripture passage as the text of our wedding. We had it read in both Spanish and English. Although reminding people of the definition of love is a wonderful focus for couples at weddings, the original passage was written for the early church community of Corinth. We as the church need to periodically be reminded of the definition of love, so we can embody the message of love and peace through our mission together.

So what is the definition of love according to the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.

We see in this definition a few key themes that are to guide individuals and communities:

Kindness, patience, hope, forbearance, truth seeking, endurance.

Notice that the definition of love involves adjectives, but also that the adjectives, the descriptions of love are active. Showing patience is an action in the world.

I personally like to describe love as both a feeling and a verb. Sometimes when we actively show love we may not be feeling a strong emotion of love for someone, but we choose to love based on our character and our commitments. We choose patience when it might be easier to be frustrated. I was recently waiting to pick up some medication and there was a long line at the pharmacy. A man walked up to the line and began to express his frustration. As we waited for the line to get shorter, I could hear him literally grunt with frustration. Although this person was a prime example of being impatient, all of us from time to time succumb to being irritable when things are slower than we hope for, whether we are in traffic or waiting for a table to open up at a restaurant. It does not help that culturally we are easily attracted to instant gratification as we pick up our phones whenever we have a moment to wait for something. God would invite us to demonstrate love by living a more patient life, especially with other people around us.

I wonder if there is another aspect of the definition of love that is difficult for you. Where might God wish to grow our capacity for love. I like the focus on kindness. Kindness again is a choice, but I find that kindness can also become a habit. I remember one of my early working experiences I was taught the value of kindness. My first real job was working in food service at Sea World. My family lived in La Jolla California at the time and one day some Sea World representatives came to our high school to interview and hire students to work during the summer. I got the job and went to training. Sea World taught us that when people come to an amusement park or a summer location for entertainment, such as Sea World, they are hoping to have the best day of their year. Our job was to be as kind as possible, so that they feel like they are having an amazing experience. It was frankly great training for me to become a future pastor that summer as I worked to be as kind as possible to customers who came to Sea World.

In our world, kindness is a wonderful way to demonstrate love on a daily basis. It is also a good reminder for how we care for our family members. Sometimes when we are around people we know well, it might be easy to so call, let our hair down. Some of us may not have much hair to let down, but you get the idea. I think it is fine to be more relaxed with our feelings and emotions with those close to us, but I wonder if kindness is one of those actions that we

actually need to especially demonstrate to our family members. Rather than taking our family or friends for granted, we need to especially show kindness to them.

I encourage you to meditate more on 1 Corinthians 13 today and see if any of the description for love might be areas when you wish to work on. Certainly, God by grace will help us grow in our capacity for love.

Thomas Merton was a trappist monk during the 20th century who was known for his prolific writing and peace activism. During my sabbatical this summer, I found some old journals. I discovered one from my freshman year and realized that while sharing my experiences daily, I would sometimes add quotes from a book I was reading by Thomas Merton. In college, I discovered maybe the most famous Thomas Merton prayer. You may remember it. It goes like this...

My Lord God

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself,

and the fact that I think I am following

your will does not mean

that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you

does in fact please you.

And I hope that I have that desire

in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything

apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this
you will lead me by the right road
though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore I will trust you always
though I may seem to be lost
and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear,
for you are ever near me
and you will never leave me
to face my perils alone.

Amen.

Thomas Merton

What a powerful prayer. It certainly gave me perspective in college and has stayed with me my whole life.

Another powerful story of Thomas Merton's life that I believe Lish mentioned in a sermon this last year, involved Thomas Merton's experience in Louisville, Kentucky when he was overcome by love.

In his book, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Thomas Merton writes, "In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs."

Merton's feeling of love for all people is something that may seem idealistic, but I am starting to realize that there are moments in my life where I am also overcome with love for people. In those moments, my heart is especially aligned with God. I bet you also experience those moments from time to time as you gaze on children or experience the beauty of nature.

Friends, the truth is that at our deepest nature is the love of God within us for God's creation. It is more natural to love than we realize and when we love

well we are living into our deepest identity as children of God who come from love and who are made to embody love in this world.

I found another quote from Thomas Merton recently that spoke about the depth of love. Merton explains that our love is at its greatest when we love people not only because they are like us but even when they are different than us.

He writes,

“The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise, we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.”

I like this reminder from Merton and it is a good reminder for all relationships. Do we only love the part of people that we resonate with or do we also love people when they are acting uniquely as themselves.

I appreciate that Paul in this portion of the letter to the Corinthians reminds his readers that the most important thing is love. As Paul shares, we can experience and do many things, but if we have not love, we are off track. Paul finishes his reflection on love by saying that faith, hope, and love but the greatest of these is love.

Love is the purpose of our lives. Love begins with a God of love and then is given to us so that we may show love to ourselves and others. As we abide in the love of God we may live this love in tangible ways. What is the definition of love. Once again, let us enjoy these words.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.

AMEN and AMEN

The Gift of Love

13 If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast[a] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.