

8-09-2020 SERMON CCI I Corinthians 13: 1-13 What Does Love Look Like?

Love means different things to different people. Anyone remember the movie Love Story that is known for the main male character saying, "Love means never having to say you're sorry." Do we agree with that? What **does** love look like? I personally love it when love looks lovely. When love looks like new parents gently holding their newborn baby with amazement at the tiny fingers and toes and the sweet dreamy face as their child sleeps. Or a bride and groom standing at the front of the church so excited to say their vows of love that they just know will last forever. Or the older couple holding hands as they walk in the park- not because it keeps them from tripping, but because they still love each other. Like grandparents who beam when they play games with their grandkids and great-grandkids and marvel at each new birth as if it is their first and can't wait to share pictures. I love it when love looks lovely.

But those of us who have ever tried to love for a lifetime, who have tried to love authentically, tried to love in a Christlike way, know that love does not always look lovely. Because that newborn grows up to be a 3 year old with a fever and in the middle of the night the parent is up rubbing their back and speaking with kindness because that's what comforts the child back to sleep, but not the parent. And then child becomes a teenager who hasn't arrived home an hour and a half after curfew and love looks like a parent waiting up wondering if they are OK. Sometimes love looks like getting up early when you don't feel like it so your family has lunches for the day. Love looks like being willing to forgive... yet again. Or like refusing to rudely snap back after a rude comment is made. Or like the elderly man caring for his wife after surgery, learning new skills he never thought he would ever need, so he can feed her through a feeding tube, patiently day after day, encouraging her when she's down. And like a person caring for a spouse with dementia who sometimes doesn't remember who they are anymore and fights the very care they need, and yet they patiently guide and clean up the messes. In this time of pandemic, love also looks like wearing a mask, staying 6 feet apart, even not worshipping together even though it breaks our hearts. Why? Because they are ways of loving our neighbor as ourselves. None of it lovely, yet love.

When the Apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 13 the most beautiful words about love the world has ever known, he knew that the greatest image of what love looks like is *not lovely at all*, because it's Christ on the cross giving his life, his everything. Christ on the cross- that's what love looks like. Paul was talking here about the kind of love that drives us to wake up every morning and choose to do

what is right and just and generous, not to receive something in return or get recognition, but because it is the Christlike thing to do. And we do it even when we don't feel like it because Christ first loved us.

When I read Paul's words about love, even though I've read them many times, I become very aware that **my** love does not always look like that. I'm not always kind, or patient, I get angry really fast sometimes, and I can hang onto hurts. Paul's words challenge me. Maybe they challenge you too. So let's explore what love looks like again.

Paul began this chapter by reminding us that love is more important than any spectacular or dramatic things we can do in the name of faith. "Though I speak in the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." The Hebrew words translated brass and cymbal were also used to describe pots and pans. In other words, without love, the best actions we can do in Jesus' name are nothing but this. {CLANG PANS} If we can prophecy or give all our money or even die for our faith, if it's not motivated by love, we are nothing.

Love is that important. Let's start with what love isn't. *Love does not envy* others for what they have that we don't. It's so easy to begrudge others' blessings or privileges as though God is being unfair to us. Envy tends to make us unthankful because if we want something else, we don't value what we have. *Love does not boast and is not proud* The Greek word translated "boast" means something like "windbag." We know what a windbag is like- a person who talks about themselves to impress. Windbags are those people who one-up anything said- they know a funnier story, they know more important people, they've had a scarier health problem, their vacation was more spectacular. Even if you share something stupid you did, they have to tell something they've done that was even stupider- and then think they're humble! Windbags turn life into a competition with them as the winners.

Love is also not rude. Love cares about the needs and feelings of others. We live in a time when rudeness, name calling and attacks are the norm, especially on social media. Whatever happened to the being able to talk and even disagree without becoming rude or offended? We get upset at rudeness online, but how often do we give **ourselves** permission to be rude to people because we're right and they're wrong? And then excuse our rudeness because we're just telling it like it is. Paul says love is not rude- even when telling hard truth. *Love is not self-seeking or easily angered-* it doesn't demand its own way. Love never says, "My way or the highway." Love says, "Let's look at this Jesus' way," the way that cares

about the needs of both sides. As American Baptists in Evergreen, we call that working for consensus. *Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs but forgives instead.* Too often we hold onto slights and disappointments and treat other people as if what we are holding against them is all they are. Just that one thing we're holding against them. Love doesn't keep such a record, it forgives, and seeks reconciliation.

In contrast, *love is patient.* The word Paul used for patient assumes a person has the power and the right to get even and chooses not to use that power. A family member forgets to turn the light off again for the umpteenth time and we're tempted to yell. Patience puts the lights in perspective with the rest of life, takes the long view, and responds differently. We often act like patience is something God has to give us, but patience here is a choice we make in the impatient moment, not because we feel like it, but because we love. Finally, *love is kind.* This word means being sweetly useful. Kind people look for ways to be helpful to others, they're gentle in their words and ways, serving from the heart. We can all be useful, but **love makes us kind** in our words and actions while we're being helpful.

Let's face it, this type of love is hard to live every moment, so Paul gives us another choice we need to make to even have a chance. *"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things."* We expect children to act in childish ways because they are children. It's natural for children to be childish. But adults who act childishly... need to grow up!

You may ask, "But didn't Jesus say that we are to be like children?" Sure, he did--we are to have faith and be willing to humble ourselves like children; but he didn't say we are to behave like children. Think of the temper tantrums young children throw when they're frustrated. I watched one as I was walking in Wilderness Park last week. He didn't want to take the path Mom chose and he threw a hissy yelling fit, and he wasn't even a young child. Don't we all know adults who do the same- they just don't throw themselves on the floor? Children are liable to grab a toy away from another child even when they already have other toys. Children have to learn to think beyond their own desires, to share, and not hit when they're frustrated, and to obey. Paul would say that we adults do too. We need to put away childish ways.

It's childish to pout, waiting for people to notice what we are not grown up enough to say. Childish to need to be first or throw temper tantrums. Childish not

to forgive and put something behind us, and it's childish not to admit when we are wrong and ask forgiveness. Paul says "Grow up!" Only grown-up Christians are able to love with a Christlike love- the love that is patient, kind, not rude, not boastful or proud, not self-serving, love that forgives instead of keeping records of what others do wrong, love that doesn't cheer evil on, love that lasts. Jesus is our model to follow in the lovely and the not-so-lovely ways of loving others. Are we grown up?