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11 o'clock am

The Community Church of Issaquah  
Issaquah, Washington

***"What I See"***

1 Corinthians 13:12-13

The very first thing that 1 Corinthians says about love is that love is patient.

Before love is kind and before love refuses to keep records of wrongs, love is willing to wait.

I was reminded this last weekend how difficult waiting can be when I spent two days out at the beach on other people's timetables. For example, we'd all agree we were ready for breakfast...and then one of us would decide to hop in the shower, and then do their makeup and then someone else would decide to make a second latte and *two hours* after we were all sitting there ready to go to breakfast—I kid you not—we were *finally* headed out the door to go eat.

Waiting is hard. Patiently sitting with your stomach grumbling is no fun.

But being late to breakfast ranks pretty low in importance on the list of the things we find ourselves waiting for in this life.

We wait for nine plus months for the baby to be born. We wait for acceptance and rejection letters. We wait for the doctor to call us back with the prognosis.

Our lives are filled with these gaps. Some happy and some sad. The gaps between conception and birth, between what has happened and what will come, between *what is already* and *what is not yet*.

You know, there are many times when we can try to close that gap and shorten the time we have to wait. We can go out and hustle and try to get that career change we've been waiting for. We can work and pray for justice. We can increase the Pitocin and get labor moving along.

But there are also other times... when we can't fill that gap. Maybe our friend's political opinions are *already* on our nerves and *not yet* where we think they should be. Can't close that gap! Or this is the gap that gets me today: what if the gap that stretches before you is

between [right now] and [when you'll get to be with the people you love].

What if the gap begins by saying goodbye. A gap like that can be unbearable.

Many of you have met the couple I've been living with this past year, Phyllis and Lodie. They've come here a couple of times. But you might not know Phyllis' story. I asked her if I could tell part of it and it was fine by her.

Phyllis' deceased husband, Scott, was my dad's best friend. Before Scott died, he was in a vegetative state for ten years after getting in a car accident. I have memories of visiting Scott both when he was being cared for by Phyllis in their home and then when he went to a nursing home in Redmond. For the first five years of Scott being vegetative, Phyllis believed that he was going to be healed. She thought that he would be healed and then they'd have a speaking ministry where they'd go around to churches witnessing to what God had done. But at year five, Phyllis says that God spoke to her. Scott wasn't going to come out of the vegetative

state. Impressed upon her heart were the words of 1 Corinthians 13, verse 12: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face."

In a world of gaps—gaps that span the distance between discovering the amazing fact that there are people you love and then heartbreak of being separated from them—we have to confess that we can only see dimly. That we don't see clearly why someone with charisma and a deep love for God and three young children would be left in a vegetative state. That we don't know why our spouse or child or best friend died. A dim world means it's difficult to figure out the "whys".

A world like this doesn't make sense to us and it shouldn't. It shouldn't make sense to have the ties that bind us broken. Death wasn't a part of God's Creation. In the garden of Eden, the pain of separation could not touch Adam and Eve.

To separation, to death, to loss, the apostle Paul says LOVE. Love that is first and foremost patient. A love that is rooted in Jesus. See we see in a mirror darkly, but the mirror we're looking into is Christ.

Jesus felt the full weight of the gap between the now and the what is to come. “My God, my God why have you forsaken me.” My God, my God why is loss touching my life? My God, my God *why*? Jesus lived a life like ours, looking into life’s dark mirror.

But Jesus also witnesses to the fact that though we see in a mirror dimly now, we will see face to face.

The dim mirror isn’t the final word. The gap does come to an end. We can be patient because we know that this in between time of separation and death will not last forever. Patience is the form love takes when we have hope that God will not abandon us eternally. Our love can be patient because Jesus rose from the dead. Our love can wait out the gap because there is resurrection life.

Until we see God face to face though, we are stuck seeing in a mirror dimly. Maybe, though, that’s not a bad thing. We could think of seeing as in a mirror dimly and think wow we see so little. But we could also think of it like that [movie scene] where the guy asks the girl if

he has a chance with her. “About one in a million,” she says. He pauses and then replies, “So you’re saying I have a chance.” We may see dimly, *but we still can see*. We still have a chance of catching glimpses of images in our dim mirrors. We still have the possibility of seeing the image of God winking back at us from the fogged-up glass.

I’ve been here for ten months. It’s hard to believe but it’s been almost a year. And in this year I’ve had many of those glimpses. As your pastor, I’ve been able to see the image of God reflecting to me out of your faces.

And *this* is what I see:

I’ve seen that your love is *patient* as you sit in waiting rooms for hours just so that you could be there to hear the diagnosis for a friend.

I’ve seen that your love is *kind* when I’ve shown up for pastoral visits with homebound members and seen cards sitting on counters from names I know.

I’ve seen that your love is without *envy or boastfulness or arrogance or rudeness*, but rather is with

humility as you love your church for what God has made you to be in this time.

I've seen you *not insist on your own way*, but give free reign to some young, female pastor to come in and mess around with worship and wear high heels if she wants to.

I've seen you *not rejoicing with wrongdoing but rejoicing in the truth* of the gospel of Jesus.

I've seen you *bear* the death of dear friends, I've seen you *believe* in your sons and daughters and in me, and I've seen you *hope* that our little group of believers here in Suite C-5 can be a slice of God's kingdom here on earth.

I have seen the image of God in you and the image of God is love.

Love isn't fancy. It's the virtue that keeps you sticking around after Sharing the Adventure to put away chairs and volunteering for that committee even if you really don't want to. It's what has sent you out with flowers to comfort a grieving brother or sister in Christ. It's what spends hours in the kitchen slicing salami and cheese for coffee

fellowship. Love is what keeps you laughing at your foibles in Adult Forum.

Love is the mustard seed that the world overlooks, but that grows into a great tree and the birds come and rest in it.

You have that mustard seed. Isn't that amazing! It has been God's good pleasure already to give you the most precious of all seeds. It might seem little, but it is more valuable than gold. Faith, hope and love remain, but the greatest of these is LOVE.

I really believe that your love for one another comes from God. You are able to love one another because you have allowed yourselves to be loved by God, and there is nothing better than being loved by God.

Community Church of Issaquah. I don't want to be patient, but I will be. I will be patient because love is patient. I will be patient because I know that because of God's good work in Jesus no separation has to last forever. **Only love is forever. Only love remains.** The gap will end. So I'm willing to wait. I know

that you're in loving hands because I know you're in God's hands.

One of my favorite songs is by a guy from Austin, Texas named David Ramirez. It's a song I learned at my old church in Texas and today I give it to you. May you receive the blessing that God has for you, the blessing of love coming down from heaven, the love as of a Father for his only Son. This is my blessing for you in the words of David Ramirez:

“I wish upon you peace. I wish upon you grace. I wish for less of what you want and more of what you need. I wish upon you an old life and a heart that stays young. But most of all, I wish upon you love.”