

First Presbyterian Church  
Bozeman, Montana  
Dan Krebill, co-pastor

February 10, 2019  
*5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
1 Corinthians 13:1-13

### Love Is . . . .

For the four Sundays of February, we've chosen to preach on the same Bible passage each week. 1 Corinthians chapter 13 is often referred to as the "love chapter" in the Bible. Indeed, as we just heard, it does have a sharp focus and presentation on the topic of love. And love has been the focus of our attention in our year-long emphasis on "Learning and Living God's Love, Together." And then, of course, it's February, and that means Valentines Day and all of its associations with love. Valentine's Day is on Thursday, so there's still time to be fully prepared.

Today then is our second of four sermons on 1 Corinthians 13. Jody began our series last Sunday by addressing the question, "Is Love All We Need?" As she began her sermon, she pointed out that these words of Paul are some of the best known of all the scriptures because of their association with weddings, both Christian and secular, where this passage is read in the context of the celebration of matrimonial love between two people being joined in marriage. And while it is not inappropriate to hear these words during a wedding, it's important that we don't limit our understanding of this love chapter to this very narrow context.

Because in actuality, marriage and the love that is celebrated at a wedding, were likely the last things on Paul's mind when he penned this chapter, writing to his friends in the church that he had helped to start in Corinth. All one need do is read the first 12 chapters leading up to this chapter to discover that the church there was in trouble. There was all sorts of conflict that had come up that had church members pitted against each other over various practices and doctrines. Paul wrote this letter to facilitate healing and reconciliation so that the church would again flourish. You can bet then that the things he was advocating were most likely the things that were either being done poorly or perhaps not being done at all. Hence he wrote a whole chapter on the topic containing lots of food for thought.

Love is so much more than a feeling or an emotion. It is more than a way of acting or behaving. Rather, love is more a way of being. As Christians, we're called into this new way so that we might demonstrate what is at the core for God's people.

After making a case for the primacy of love as the foundation for the Christian community in Corinth, Paul goes on to delineate seven things that love is, as well as 8 things that love is not. In all, he references 15 different aspects of love to drive home the point of the centrality of love.

In the 8 words that Paul uses to say what love is not, we can surmise that they were likely what the Corinthian Christians were doing. Otherwise why would Paul take time to mention them?

He says that love is not envious. When love is at the core, there is no place for envy. For envy can lead to jealousy where our focus on the other is less about what they have to offer and more about what they have that I do not have. Envy sets up people against one another or in unhealthy competition with the other. When envy gains a foothold in a community, the integrity of the community is compromised if not imperiled.

Paul says that love is not boastful. Like envy, boastfulness pits people over and against each other. The one boasting is in essence saying, "look what I have that you don't have." Or it could have to do with having more of something compared to what others have of the same commodity. When envy infects a community, it is trouble.

He says that love is not arrogant. This is a most unseemly and unpleasant trait when exhibited; because the implication behind those exhibiting it is that they are expressing their belief that they are superior to others. Arrogance alone can destroy a community that is built around a common understanding and identity. In the case of the Christian community, the idea that we're all equal in God's sight is totally undermined by those who feel otherwise.

The fourth thing according to Paul that love is not is rude. Love is not rude. Respect and mutuality in a community is obscured or drowned out when there are those who act in a rude way. Rudeness enters the fray when one is acting and behaving as if there were no others involved or as if the consequences of one's rude behavior are not valued or considered.

Closely related to the others, love is does not insist on its own way. The very nature of community is the ability to collaborate and compromise with the understanding that there are ways to understand something or to do something that may be quite different from my own way. Insisting that there is only one way—my way—is another barrier to a flourishing community.

Love is not irritable. Community requires that everyone give and take without irritation. When one is irritable, there is little room for the flexibility that is needed for coming to terms or reaching a compromise that is mutually acceptable.

The seventh thing in Paul's list of what love is not, is that love is not resentful. Resentfulness is like carrying a grudge when one does not get his or her way. Resentfulness is like an infection that can fester and spread in a way that the community's mutuality and respect is completely undermined. Resentfulness is an ugly trait that sours the entire community.

And finally, the eighth and last in his list of what love is not, is that love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. This is perhaps the most devious trait of them all in that when those rejoice in wrongdoing they are actually cheering on the destruction of the community. For they recognize what is wrong and nevertheless celebrate it in a most unhealthy way.

To summarize then, love is not envious; love is not boastful; love is not arrogant; love is not rude; love does not insist on its own way; love is not irritable; love is not resentful; and love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. When we pause, we can realize that Paul is mentioning all of these destructive aspects because this is exactly what he is observing in the church that he loves in Corinth. It's distressing and it's discouraging to think that this was the reality at that time.

So if this list of eight traits of what love is not, then what is love? How does Paul describe what love is?

The first of seven that Paul mentions: Love is patient. Patience at its core is all about making space and room. It's taking the time needed—actually all the time needed—to reach agreement or to come into equilibrium. Patience is one of those traits to which we all aspire if we truly want to be an equal member of the community.

Love is not just patient as far as waiting the necessary amount of time, love is also kind. Kindness implies a gentleness that truly makes space for the other. True kindness wraps up the sense of worth and value of the one expressing kindness with the worth and value of those to whom kindness is extended. Patience and kindness are at the heart of a thriving community.

Love rejoices in truth. When truth is valued there is not arguing over the facts. Love rejoices in truth telling that takes place within a community. Keeping the truth in the open, in the center, is a way of ensuring that a community is grounded and established. Love enables this foundation.

With patience, kindness and truth at its center, love enables and strengthens a community to withstand the storms and tempests that inevitably arise from time to time. Foundational love is a strong anchor that provides stability and steadfastness.

To say that love believes all things is to acknowledge just how resilient love can be in the face of whatever happens—both good and bad—over the course of time. To say that love believes all things is to say that love endures when truth is at its center. Love will persist and endure.

The sixth aspect of love that Paul lifts up is that love hopes all things. Hope is a powerful force within our human ability. Hope can serve to provide what it takes to successfully navigate the valleys or low points of life when we are in community with one another. Hope provides motivation and impetus to move ahead, to move forward no matter what the odds of success appear to be. Hope is the part of love that makes it so lasting.

The seventh and last thing Paul says that love is, is that love endures all things. Endurance is closely related to hope in that it actually springs from hope. We are able to endure because of the hope that we have in the midst of whatever besets us.

So, love, according to Paul's testimony to the Corinthians, is patient; love is kind; love rejoices in truth; love bears all things; love believes all things; love hopes all things; and love endures all things.

Just as his list of what love is not, is likely a description of the brokenness of the Christian community in Corinth, Paul's list of what love is, what love looks like, is more aspirational. It's given to the Corinthians to show them a more excellent way. Rather than just telling them what not to do, Paul provides them with a list of goals to which they can aspire in order to be the church that God intends.

As we know from walking through the stores in February, this is the month that romantic and familial love and friendship is celebrated. Another event that happens in the life of our congregation each year on the second Sunday of this month is the annual meeting of the congregation. It's surely a celebration of another year of success in the living out our life as a community of faith. It's also a time for us to look ahead to determine where it is that we think God is leading us in the coming year.

I'd like to suggest that this year, as we hear and read about all that has gone on in the life and ministry of our church, that we take the pulse of sorts to evaluate and determine how well we have lived out what Paul describes as a Christian community, founded on and committed to love at its core. Will we have avoided the traits describing what love is not? And will we have embraced and lived into what love is?

With the full acknowledgment that I cannot speak with a full measure of objectivity, I would profess that I think we have done a darn good job of striving for that which love is in all that we have accomplished as First Presbyterian Church in Bozeman, Montana. I thank God for this. I thank God for each of you and the part you play. And I thank God for the saving love offered to us in Jesus Christ.