

LOVE IS ESSENTIAL ON THIS JOURNEY
1 Corinthians 13

¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

² And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

⁴ Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

¹⁰ But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

¹¹ 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.

¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

¹³ And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Good Afternoon my sisters and brothers in Christ! *How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!*¹ I am new to the observations of the Lenten Season. I don't have any clear memories of Lent being taught in the west side, black, National Baptist church of my youth. My earliest memories of Lent were as an undergrad in a Catholic all women's college in Lake Forest, IL. It seemed to me that giving up meat for 40 days did little to bring me closer to Christ. And then when I counted the days from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday I was even more confused, because anyway I counted the number exceeded 40. In an effort to understand the need to observe Lent I went to other Christian sources aside from my own. There, as is often the case, the great theologians could not find agreement. Some said that Lent was for the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness prior to beginning His ministry. Others taught it was 44 days or even 56 days and without any justification for the number that I could understand. The only things the sources held in common was an acknowledgment that the period from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday was one in which we as believers were called to spend time drawing near to Christ.

There came a time when I wanted to have more spiritual disciple and so I begin to explore traditions and habits that were not my heritage, but still spoke to my heart. I learned to appreciate and observe Advent. I wrote children's message around Advent. But I still had not embraced Lent. The concept of giving up something to move closer to someone still did not resonate with my Spirit. During that journey I read (and I wish I could remember the source) that Lent was not about giving up, it was totally about drawing nearer. So I decided that one could draw near by adding to as well as giving up. During those early years I added to – more prayer time – more devotion and praise time – more looking into and waiting on God to lead and direct. The “adding to” brought key words into focus for me. You have heard some of them during this Lenten Series of sermons. Words like **CONFESSING AND SINGING**, words that help us to focus and draw nearer to Christ. I want to add another word and that is **LOVING**.

Would you pray with me and for me as a wrestle with the theme?

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¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm133&version=NIV>

SHALL WE PRAY

God of heaven and earth we your people are here in this place desiring to hear a Word from you. We have committed ourselves to moving away from our velvet ruts of “we never did this before” and embracing “new and different” so that we might see you with a fresh vision. Send your Holy Spirit to help us. Abba, I ask that you use me to bring this Word as best I know how. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you. AMEN AND AMEN.

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I was writing this sermon in the library with my 7-year-old grandson sitting across from me. He had selected a book from the black history display to read for his quiet time. The first page said, “We must meet hate with love.” He turned and as only a 7 year old could, he said, “This does not make sense.” I responded Jesus teaches we are to love those who don’t love us... before I could finish Jamie said “yeah, they teach us that at church.”

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I saw about 3 minutes of CNN’s coverage last Thursday of the Pope as he questioned whether or not Donald Trump was Christian. As I understood the Pope’s comments he wanted to know how someone could be Christian when they did not want to help, protect or even tolerate those who held opinions different from their own.

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For 13 years I have served a congregation that has tolerated a sub-set of members who bend the rules; spin the truth; are rude and disrespectful of children and seniors; and are currently planning a coup. We have tolerated them because a church is a hospital for sinners not a social club for saints.

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Paul writes to the church at Corinth and to Christians everywhere to help them with their problems, heal their divisions, and answer their questions. This particular letter has meaning for us today because Chicago and the surrounding areas have much in common with the New Testament city of Corinth. Corinth has been described as a cultural melting pot with a great diversity of wealth, religions, and moral standards. Corinth had a reputation for being as corrupt as any city in the world. Corinth had legalized prostitution and there were at least 10,000 prostitutes employed by the pagan temples. The reputation of the city was such that prostitutes in other cities were called "Corinthian girls."

In addition to the lack of moral standards as we understand them as Christians there was also a movement of intellectualism – this notion of using your brain to explain everything. It is said that the men of the day would spend their time in discussion about Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Sex was everywhere, men were talking but not doing, and to borrow the words of my mother the city "was going to hell in a hand basket."

When I read about Corinth I think about my old neighborhood, where the men gathered in the barber shop, the shoe shine parlor and in the parks to talk about the politics of the day, how the kids were no good and whatever stupid thing had happen on television. And before the day was over the conversation would drift to sex; who was getting; who was not; and where the best could be found. Those men talked about how no good our kids were, but they did not attempt to teach them a trade. They did not mentor them as they had been mentored in Indianola. They sat and talked and did nothing. Those men did not think our kids were worth fighting for.

Therefore, this letter is especially written to those who live in a sex-saturated, wisdom-loving atmosphere and are trying to live as Christians in the midst of all the pressures that constantly come from these two areas.²

In chapter 1-6 Paul addresses the problems of the church and from chapter 6-16 Paul answered their questions. But in the midst of answering their questions it seems to me that Paul stops and tells them that:

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² https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stedman_ray/Adv_1Cr/Adv_1Cr.cfm?a=1075001

Somebody is wondering just what journey I am talking about. I am talking about the journey to be more like Jesus. When I first got married I realized my husband and I had very different definitions about how you live life. Anybody willing to admit they know what I am talking about? The Rev. Dr. Jesse though life was a journey – sometimes scenic, sometimes scary, but always a journey. I on the other hand thought life was a battle – big battles, little battles, insignificant battles – but a battle. Maybe that was my west side coming out! But I have learned if I approach praise and worship; and living into my call; and serving God's people as a battle I may not be able **to hold my peace and let the Lord fight my battles**. So I have begun to embrace life as a journey – journey toward being more like Christ. But being more like Christ is just not the call of the preachers, teachers, and deacons, it is the call of every Christian.

The problem that we encounter when we begin to apply love to the journey is that we don't always have a clear understanding of love. Someone might say that we have love and lust mixed up and we use them interchangeably. We are stuck in an AI Green time wrap and still singing love and happiness. Some of us are afraid to love because all we can hear is Bill Withers telling us that love will use us up. Someone of us never experienced love and so we don't know love and can't give love – but wait that is another sermon.

The Love I need you to understand is a love that comes from Him who is love. The One that calls us to love!

But LOVE is an all-inclusive affection, embracing not only every other affection proper to its object, but all that is proper to be done to its object; for as love spontaneously seeks to please its object, so, in the case of men to God, it is the native well spring of a voluntary obedience. It is, besides, the most personal of all affections.

One may fear an event, one may hope for an event, one may rejoice in an event; but one can love only a Person. It is the tenderest, the most unselfish, the most divine of all affections. Such, then, is the affection in which the essence of the divine law is declared to consist.³

See, I know for a fact if you leave home and there was no love shared or expressed and you go to church and you don't feel love because someone is in your pew, leading

³ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/jfb/Mar/Mar_012.cfm?a=969029

your song or looking at you wrong that by the time you get out in the community you cannot show love because you don't have any.

Yet the only way to express love is in action and deed. As Baptist we are not called to live our lives as monks or cloistered nuns in constant prayer. As Baptist we are called, no we are commanded to demonstrate our love for each other.

John 21³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.'

You cannot take care of yourself, your family, your neighbors, or your community without love. The greatest expression of love is for me an image on a cross.

I began with my 7 year old grandson and I will end with him.

Jamie why do you want to be baptized?

You know grandmother.

I know but I want you to tell me.

I love Jesus and I want to meet him.

Amen!