

Today's scripture is one of the most well known, even by those who never attend a Sunday service. 1st Corinthians 13 is heard at many, many weddings. And why not? It is a beautiful description of the love between two people. And yet, reading it at a wedding is a relatively new phenomenon, and probably limited to the English Speaking world. Why? Well, the word which our current translations render as "love" is based on the Greek word "agape" which means to love in a moral or social sense. Agape love is the love for other people without a familial (storge) or a romantic (eros) or a friendship (philia) component. And so it is only an accident of language and a bit of imprecision in the modern English Language that has led to reading this scripture at weddings. Those who are familiar with the Old King James version of this scripture will remember that it is not love but the word, "charity" that is used in that translation. Charity, which used to mean love and compassion for our fellow men and women which sometimes led to people giving support to a stranger in need in the form of food or clothing or encouragement or money. Somehow in our money driven modern society, the word has shrunk in meaning only to giving money, even to large institutions, but enough language history for today.

The writer of this beautiful sermon on love, Paul, is not waxing eloquent on either romance or family relations, but is talking about the love we are to express to all people, indeed to all creation - compassionate love that seeks justice for all. Paul is writing these words to a church that is experiencing the typical things a growing and vibrant church will go through. They are arguing about whose spiritual gifts are more important, why those baptized by Paul feel superior to those baptized by Apollo. They debate how to do the Lord's Supper the right way and argue about their beliefs, and so on and so on.

In his letter, Paul is reminding the Church in Corinth that there is only one thing that is ultimately important; agape love. Much like Jude reminded us last week, our mission as followers of Jesus is to put first things, first; so Paul is reminding the people of Corinth that much of what they debate and have conflict about is ultimately not nearly as important as we are tempted to think it is. All the spiritual gifts and abilities we bring to write sermons, keep finances on track, bring inspiring music, call us to missions, do strategic planning are temporary gifts for a temporal time. Paul reminds the Corinthians (and us) that only one thing lasts forever: agape Love - shown most perfectly in Christ Jesus.

And so as we enter into our annual meeting today, we too, remind ourselves of the love we are called to exhibit in everything we do. Paul reminds us exactly what love is. Love is patient - Sometimes patience is hard, and the words of Jesus when asked how many times we must forgive seem appropriate to the amount of patience we exhibit as well. "How many times must I

be patient with this person?" "70 X 7!" Jesus responds, which means an infinite number of times in the numerology of the first century. Though, I am pretty sure my wife has a notebook with hashmarks on me and I think I am getting close to that 490 times having to be forgiven. Kindness is the second attribute of Agape. Common basic courtesy plus can make someone know that you are expressing God's love to them, even if they are a stranger in line at a store or on the highway.

As he helps the Corinthians figure out how to faithfully make decisions together. Paul further clarifies what love is by telling them what what love is not. "Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way." I think Paul is showing us the warning signs when we may be engulfed in what Eckart Tolle calls, "ego mind." We can see ego come out when we give in to a belief that our thoughts and ideas are the true reality, and we just need to help our colleagues wake up to that truth. A newly married man went into work one day and told his boss, a woman who had been married for several years, that he and his beloved had had their first fight. "If only I could make her see that I am right!" His boss smiled and said, "You know early in my marriage I realized it is sometimes more important to be "happy, than to be right." In our own interactions and decisions as a church, I often have to remind myself that my choice is not between being on the winning or losing side, but is usually about deciding between love and humility and the ego driven, self-righteous belief that I am right about any topic. Paul goes on to describe what love is not even after decisions are made, encouraging the Corinthians to avoid the pitfalls that come after conflict: "(Love) is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth."

Paul ends his teaching on love with a positive picture of Agape, one that pushes us to engage always with hope: "(Love) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Hope and patience (again) is the bedrock of our task as church. As we honestly talk about the year ahead today, We must remain realistic but avoid getting bogged down in pessimism or negativity. It is a fine line for sure, but we are an institution of faith and transformation. We must sometimes err toward the phrase, "reality is overrated,," rather than give in to the panic and fear the world offers us regularly.

Finally Paul reminds us that Agape love is one of very few thing that lasts forever, "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. Love is the singular greatest aim of God and the church, This is the first-things-first we must hold to in all circumstances, but especially when we enter into times of decision making together. Our founder, Jesus, the Christ, will not judge Faith United Church of Christ by our balance sheet. We will not be penalized if we don't reach 15% growth in membership every year. We are not evaluated on the number of prayers or potlucks. If Jesus had an evaluation form and was here today, I think it

would only have one criteria for evaluation: Love? Is there love at Faith United Church of Christ, for one another, for the visitor off the street, for a world in need/ Is there love here? I think we would do OK, but we must keep striving to be a people of faith, hope, and most importantly, love as we continue moving forward in 2016. AMEN

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 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. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

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. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

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. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, 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. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

- Agápe (ἀγάπη agápē[1]) means "love: esp. brotherly love, charity; the love of God for man and of man for God." [2] Agape is used in ancient texts to denote feelings for one's children and the feelings for a spouse, and it was also used to refer to a love feast. [3] Agape is used by Christians to express the unconditional love of God for his children. [citation needed] [4] This type of love was further explained by Thomas Aquinas as "to will the good of another." [5]

- Éros (ἔρως érōs) means "love, mostly of the sexual passion." [6] The Modern Greek word "erotas" means "intimate love." Plato refined his own definition: Although eros is initially felt for a person, with contemplation it becomes an appreciation of the beauty within that person, or even becomes appreciation of beauty itself. Plato does not talk of physical attraction as a necessary part of love, hence the use of the word platonic to mean, "without physical attraction." In the Symposium, the most famous ancient work on the subject, Plato has Socrates argue that eros helps the soul recall knowledge of beauty, and contributes to an understanding of spiritual truth, the ideal "Form" of youthful beauty that leads us humans to feel erotic desire – thus suggesting that even that sensually based love aspires to the non-corporeal, spiritual plane of existence; that is, finding its truth, just like finding any truth, leads to transcendence. [7] Lovers and philosophers are all inspired to seek truth through the means of eros.

- Philia (φιλία philía) means "affectionate regard, friendship," usually "between equals." [8] It is a dispassionate virtuous love, a concept developed by Aristotle. [9] In his best-known work on ethics, Nicomachean Ethics, philia is expressed variously as loyalty to friends, family, and community, and requires virtue, equality, and familiarity. Furthermore, in the same text philos denotes a general type of love, used for love between family, between friends, a desire or enjoyment of an activity, as well as between lovers.

- Storge (στοργή storgē) means "love, affection" and "especially of parents and children" [10] It's the common or natural empathy, like that felt by parents for offspring. [11] Rarely used in ancient works, and then almost exclusively as a descriptor of relationships within the family. It is also known to express mere acceptance or putting up with situations, as in "loving" the tyrant.