

FEBRUARY 2ND – 10:30AM
SPRINGFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Love Never Ends

I. Not Safe For Wedding Readings

This passage is one that is often chosen by lovebirds for their wedding day, because on the surface and outside of the context of the story, the reading is really lovely. It's often spoken in hushed and soft kindness, 'Love is patient, love is kind...' and while that's true, these words were meant for a far different world.

This passage comes right from the letter that Paul sends the Corinthians, and instead of a soft and subtle message, he is actually there to tell them off for their bad behaviour. The reading instead might look like a parent scolding a child, 'Love is *patient*, love is *kind*.' And then Paul has to tell the church everything that love is not – it is not boastful, or rude, or rejoices in its own way – love is not what you are doing – you've got the definition wrong here.

The passage that comes before the one we hear today is also often misread, where it talks about how each spiritual gift of the

community is important and an integral part of the body of Christ. Now, again, that's true – but the reason Paul had to write this was because people in the Corinthian church had some inflated ego issues – some folks thought they were more important, and they knew better. These folks were abusing their freedom, refusing to share, scorning each other's spiritual gifts, boasting, and vying for a high up position in the church.

The Corinthian church lost sight of the meaning of the Gospels, of the very essence of why Christ came to Earth in the first place. And we could look shamefully upon the Corinthians, but we do it too – to some extent, in our modern lives. In our context, when we – and I mean the universal 'we' - succeed, we can take all the credit and forget that God has given us the gifts and has equipped us for that success. When we enjoy the comfort and safety of a roof over our heads, we forget that we have blessed in receiving that provision. Yet, when things go wrong, when inevitable failure happens because we are human – we don't seem to forget about God in that moment – instead, for some, it's God's fault. It's interesting that 'we' – as a society – may forget praise when things are great, but when things go south, God is the target.

This is a simple illustration, but Lorna and I were just having this chat yesterday. You go on Amazon or some website store to buy an item and the only time, genuinely, I ever really give a review is when things go poorly. I cannot remember the last time I wrote a review to say, 'This is awesome!' – and it's not because I'm mean, I think I've just expected things to be awesome. Even in our short talk, I was reminded in my mind that even in the little things, life and wellbeing is better in showing thanks and gratitude alongside the honest commentary if things go poorly. So, when it comes to life as a whole – to really expand and exaggerate this illustration – I and we – need to be grateful and point to God when things are good and when things aren't going so swell. It's in there that we find a healthier and more fruitful balance.

II. Love Conquers All

So, the Corinthian church and ourselves, as a society, can get a bit lost, and this letter helps us to remember some poignant truths that are timeless. The reality is – that no matter what we do, whether we share the Good News, whether we study for

hours on end, whether we give over everything we own to goodwill – if we do not do those things in love – it means nothing.

Love never ends. Possessions – whether that’s the furniture in your house or the knowledge you have in your brain – those things will fade away. Your gifts will fade away, your abilities will fade away, but love never ends.

Consider it this way – we have had many deaths last year, and while we all can appreciate the great strides that our beloved friends who joined the saint triumphant have accomplished – the one thing that remains is love. The one thing that surpasses their deaths is love. It isn’t a letter, it isn’t their accolades, but it’s how they loved that sticks with me, with us, and that love conquers death and transforms us again and again.

III. We Don’t See The Whole Picture

Another poignant reminder that Paul shares with the Corinthians, is this sharp reality: we don’t know it all. Paul says – we see in the mirror dimly – and we do, we are not able to see the world around us or understand the world around us in the

magnificent way that God does. And all that we say and do, we do in part – we make judgments and choices based on what we know and what we have learned, but let us not ever be so boastful or so arrogant to imagine that we have the whole picture in front of us. Like I say often, it is that comforting and uncomfortable reminder: God is God and we are not.

To close the sermon today, I took some time to look outside the window as the snow fell and reflected to myself what love means for me, here and now. That may change, it may resonate today and it may resonate with some of you, and perhaps it will not in this time and place. But, as I close with my own reflection, I pray that you also reflect – on what love means for you in your context, in the life that you lead everyday, and how that love that have found through the perfect example of Jesus Christ can transform you. And now, I poetically reflect:

Love is praying for someone's happiness, even if it impedes on my own.

Love is asking for forgiveness, especially when it hits my pride.

Love is saying goodbye to the things in life that make me comfortable because they aren't good for me.

Love is acknowledging love for myself, in when doing things wrong, love tells me, 'You're still worthy.'

Love is hoping for the best even when it looks dismal.

Love is being on the other line of the phone at 3 in the morning, despite the desire for sleep.

Love is challenging the systems that oppress both my friends and my enemies.

Love is admitting that I don't know the whole picture, and that only God knows.

Love is being scared and vulnerable and doing it anyway.

Love is leaving judgment to God and offering a kind word even when we disagree.

Love is asking for help, because we weren't meant to be alone in this world.

Love is in the little things: in letting the person in the grocery aisle go ahead of you, in opening a door, in giving a dollar to someone who is short on change.

Love is everywhere. Love is in us - because Love found us - because Love created us - because Love changed us - because Love is Christ and that Love never ends. Amen.