

“IT’S DIFFERENT”
A Sermon Preached at
FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Belleville, IL
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(transcribed from audio file)

Our scripture this morning is from 1 Corinthians 13:1-7.

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
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, and have not charity, I am nothing.
And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.
Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* NRSV

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Growing up I remember there was a shop at the mall during Christmas time that had a bunch of small budget items, trinkets, little things. Nothing that would break the bank, dollar store options and kids could come and shop there for family members. And a volunteer would kinda walk them through the little shop and they could pick things out for a loved one. It enabled kids to have some independence and be able to give a gift to a loved one that was a surprise. A gift that the loved one wasn't right next to them when they picked out.

I remember helping kids shop there and there was a trend that I noticed. The youngest, the littlest of them would want to buy a toy. Toys that they liked even though this was a gift for someone else. Because, of course, their grandfather would love a Paw Patrol figurine, or their mom would really want that Polly Pocket.

But with the older kids I noticed a different trend. Most of them were different. They would thoughtfully pick out a gift like a pair of earrings for mom and when I asked why they picked out the earrings cause I'm a curious person and I ask a lot of questions, they would say something like, "Well my mom really loves jewelry," or "Well, they're turquoise blue and that's her favorite color."

At some point as kids grew and matured most of them learned that loving someone means taking into consideration that other person when you give them a gift. They learned that when you love someone you need to consider that other person and what they might actually appreciate. They've begun, I think, to understand that love doesn't ask, what about me? Love asks, what about them?

Our passage this morning describes love and it's describing love in Christian community. It's Paul writing to the Corinthians, reminding the Corinthians that Christian community is supposed to be different. He was writing to them back during the time when people who worshipped Dius Fidius and other gods, would bang gongs and cymbals in worship. They would play the trumpet really loudly, so that's what the scripture is referencing when it talks about cymbals and gongs.

Paul says, Community without love is like the community of those who worshipped false gods. It's noisy but it's without substance. It might get loud and get your attention, but at the end of the day what was the point.

Love is fundamental to Christian community. It's what sets it apart. It's what gives it substance and it's what shows that we are different. Different because we worship a god who loves us. Different because we worship a god who calls us to love others. In the list of what love is in our scripture you can add the word, to or with others, to most of the statements.

Love is patient – with others.

Love is kind – to others.

Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude – to others.

It does not insist on its own way and is not irritable and keeps no record of wrong.

It does not rejoice in the wrongdoing of others but rejoices in truth.

Love requires us to go outside of ourselves; to go beyond our own ways and our own selfish thoughts. It's nice to think that it maybe just takes a little growing up or maturing to learn how to love others well. Right? Like the difference from the little, tiny kids picking out the toy they want, to the older kid being thoughtful.

But it doesn't feel so simple as we're adults, does it? Most of us can maybe think about another person when we're picking out a gift, but just like the Corinthian community back then, Christian community can get a little messy. Being in community means that we're in relationship with people. People. People who might not think the way that we do. People who might not act the way that we do. People who might not talk the way that we do. People who might not dress the way that we do. Being in community means that we are in relationship with people. People who are different than us. The audacity. It's crazy.

People who might not respond to email as fast as we like. People who might drop the ball on a task that they signed up for and said that they would do before the next committee meeting. People who might say something flippantly or dismissively that hurts our feelings. People who are imperfect, just like us.

But when we are in community with people, it can be tempting. It can be so tempting to snap at someone instead of being patient. It can be tempting to be harsh or mean. It can be tempting to insist on our own way and even keep track of the wrongs of someone else.

But the whole reason we are in this community, that we're part of this particular community, is because of our love of God, and so we choose to be different. It's not just growing up, maturing and being able to pick out a thoughtful gift. It's a different type of maturity. It's a maturity of faith. A faith that challenges us, calls us to not ask ourselves, what about me? But what about them? We ask that when we feel like our patience is gone. When we want to snap and say the mean thing that is definitely in our head. When we want to be rude, we are called to ask, what about them?

The good news is that the Corinthians, back in the day, needed to be reminded of this so we're not alone in needing this reminder because it's almost like we're people just like they were.

And the better news in all of this is that God doesn't need to be reminded to love us. God loves us - period. In God's love is the foundation of what brings us together in true Christian community. God's love is different, and it is what inspires us to be different.

Amen? Amen.