June 28, 2020

Love’s Modesty

READ: 1 Corinthians 13:4 (Common English Bible)

“Love is patient, love is kind, it isn’t jealous, it doesn’t brag, it isn’t arrogant.”

REFLECT:

It is reported that Abraham Lincoln once made a speech before a huge audience and was greeted with a loud and long applause. As he was leaving the podium, a man said, “That was a great speech Mr. President; listen to how they enjoyed what you said!” Lincoln, in his usual self-deprecating manner, responded, “I am kept humble by the fact that the crowd would be twice as large if I were to be hanged.” Always modest, never vaulting himself or puffed up, Abraham Lincoln cared little for his own reputation. He did not need to. His love for his country, his desire for useful service characterized by empathy, humility, and respect for opposing opinions made him as large as the monument erected in his honor in Washington, D.C.

“Love,” the apostle Paul writes, doesn’t brag, nor is it arrogant. These two qualities of love are closely related to each other. “Doesn’t brag” refers to outward conduct and behavior; “isn’t arrogant” refers to an inward disposition. Together they characterize someone who is modest, ready to stoop to serve. We think again of Jesus on that dark night that he was betrayed. On their way to the Upper Room the disciples disputed as to who of them was the greatest. Each of them presented arguments for their own claim to the highest honor. The result was that when they arrived to the Upper Room and took their seats, not one of them would stoop to the humble service of foot washing. So Jesus rose from the table, took a towel and a basin, and began to wash the disciple’s feet.

The church in Corinth is experiencing quarrelsome behavior that is dividing the faith community. Various members are elevating themselves, declaring possession of the greater spiritual gifts. The one who has the gift of tongues believed they exercised a gift beyond compare, especially over the more plain and practical gift of prophecy. The same manner of boasting and argument infused the discourse over any number of spiritual gifts. Rather than placing each gift at the disposal of the community, to bless and build, competitiveness became the order of the day. The result of all the boasting was friction and strife. The cure for all that, writes the apostle Paul, is love – a love that has no mark of brag, or swank, or swagger. Genuine love, love that builds the community of faith is modest.

Love never seeks to assert its superiority. The love that Paul desires for the Corinthian Church is one that serves, seeking the welfare of others. That love takes no notice of the worthiness of another. Nor does it seek acknowledgement. Only one concern is present – to serve another in a manner that eases the strain and burden of life. It is a love that is captured by the belief that God continues to be at work in the lives of individuals, reconciling them to God and changing them into something so much more than they presently are. As this demonstration of love takes possession of our souls, what is ugly, and bitter, and broken in our lives is diminished. What
increases in our hearts is patience and love that knows no jealousy and celebrates the gladness of another.

RESPOND:

1. How has this scripture or meditation spoken to you? Pray: “What would you have me hear, O Lord?”

2. What one specific act do you intend to take, an attitude to change, a person to see, or prayer to pray? Pray: “What would you have me do, O Lord?”

PRAY:

Envy grows into hate and hate is demonstrated in strife and discord. Forgive all my impulses that diminish the value of another. Increase love in my heart today, a love that thinks of another’s needs before my own. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

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