



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for May 22, 2022
“Home Construction: Love Defined”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: I Corinthians 13:1-8a

Weddings

I have done a lot of weddings. I mean a lot of weddings. I have done so many weddings that all the weddings I have done sort of meld into one big wedding.

I do remember one wedding though where I caught on fire. It wasn't much of a fire, but it was a fire. I had given things over to someone who was asked by the couple to read a passage of scripture. I backed up a bit and found myself in a maze of flowers and candles. The groomsmen behind began to beat on my robe. It had caught fire, which they promptly put out.

I went on with the service acting as if nothing happened. At the end I said, *“Well, this will go down as the wedding where the preacher caught fire.”*

Readings are common during a wedding service. Couples usually choose between a few well-known passages. One though you would think would be read a lot is I Corinthians 13. *“Oh, everyone does that one,”* the couples will say, and because everyone says that it never gets read. I think I Corinthians 13 should be read at every wedding. It is a wonderful definition of love.

The Most Excellent Way

In writing I Corinthians 13 Paul talks about what he calls, *“the most excellent way.”* He knows that love was the way of our Lord. He realizes that love is the critical ingredient for any relationship.

We can do a lot of things in this life, but if we don't have love, it's pretty much all for naught. When it comes to family, we can be involved in all sorts of activities with our kids, even exhaust ourselves chasing after the illusion of the perfect family, but if love's not there, it is all for nothing.

Love for others is the most powerful and profound of all emotions. It is so powerful and so profound that it almost goes beyond description. It's almost impossible to define. We know love when we see it though. Or better put, we know it when we experience it.

Paul takes a stab at defining love when he writes I Corinthians 13. Let's hear then a portion of that chapter as we read I Corinthians 13:1-8a.

1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails.

Love Defined

A dictionary is a good place to start when trying to define love. This definition is as good as any. From the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* love is “a strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties.”

That only begins to get at the heart of what love is.

Agape Love

The Greek word used in I Corinthians 13 for love is *agape*. It is a rich word fraught with all sorts of meaning. Paul uses it intentionally. *Agape* love is a reflection of God’s love. It is God’s way with us and should be our way with other people. *Agape* is deeper and more enduring than friendship. It is offered without self-interest.

Author James Packer goes so far as to say that “*the Greek word agape seems to have been a Christian invention—a new word for a new thing.*” *Agape* then is a Christian thing.

Love Defined

In I Corinthians 13, Paul does a really good job defining what love is and, conversely, what it isn’t.

He employs fifteen short phrases. Each of them is profound in their own way. As a group they really bring home what Paul is trying to say. Every one of them challenges us to live into the high calling of loving other people.

Of the fifteen, seven are stated positively. Eight of them make their point in the negative. Paul knows that a good way to learn is not just to consider what something is, but what it isn’t.

Love Defined in the Positive

“Love is patient, love is kind” writes Paul, *“it rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”*

These phrases stated so positively inspire us to the lofty heights of love.

- Love that is patient bears with people despite their imperfections.
- Love that is kind demonstrates itself in supportive and compassionate acts.
- Love that rejoices with the truth revels in things that are right and recognizes those things in others.
- Love that protects looks out for the needs of others, even at the expense of the individual.
- Love that trusts can be counted on and looks for the same in others.
- Love that hopes looks for good things to happen as a relationship grows and prospers.
- Love that perseveres is longsuffering and is in it for the long haul.

Think about it, all these things are applicable to family, and we are left to consider how they are playing out in our own families.

Love Defined in the Negative

As we said just a second ago, eight of the fifteen statements Paul uses to define love are put in the negative.

“Love is not jealous,” writes Paul. “It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude; it is not selfish. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil.”

These phrases stated in the negative give us pause to consider how they may be at play in our lives, especially when it comes to family.

- Jealousy only leads to uncertainty and keeps us from trusting those we love.
- Boastfulness shines light on ourselves at the expense of others.
- Pride does much the same but goes a bit further. Those who are arrogant consider they’re the only ones who matter.
- Rudeness works to belittle other people and has a way of hurting those we love.
- Selfishness seeks to come out on top and is satisfied with others being left in the dust. Others are not given a chance to grow and prosper.
- Anger is hurtful in every way. Those easily provoked make it tough on everyone else. It’s no fun walking on eggshells.
- Keeping no record of wrongs is a natural outgrowth of forgiveness, which is necessary for any relationship to prosper.
- Taking no delight in evil keeps everyone on the right path.

Envy, boastfulness, pride, rudeness, selfishness, anger, keeping a record of wrongs, delighting in evil—all of these at their base are founded in selfishness, which is the very antithesis of love.

When Paul speaks about such things, he is talking about those traits that have no place in our relationships, especially those we have in family.

Love Never Fails

Paul puts it succinctly, *“Love never fails.”*

He exclaims with all the energy he can muster, *“love never fails.”*

Love won’t fail:

- When times get tough.
- When disappointment abounds.
- And when we feel as though we can’t make it another day.

Love has a way of seeing us through.

Love has always been God’s answer, just consider the life of Christ. His love would not wilt in the face of hardship.

I have heard it said that *“love at first sight is nothing special. Love, though, is special when two people face the challenges of life and persevere.”*

More good things have been done in the name of love than by any other means. More relationships have been struck, more hurts healed, more progress made because of love.

“So, these three remain: faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.”

Without love, life is without its essential foundation.

Make Love Your Aim

Paul summarizes things as he finishes up what William Barclay calls *“one of the most wonderful chapters in the entire New Testament.”*

In I Corinthians 14:1, Paul writes, *“Make love your aim.”*

That should be the desire of every one of us, particularly when it comes to family. Love is the one essential thing upon which we need to construct our homes.

In seeking to make love our aim, I can't help but remember what Gary Chapman says about the language of love in his book, *The Five Languages of Love*.

He asserts that each person has his/her love language, kids included. We'd do well to consider that language when relating to those we love.

Those languages include:

- Gifts
- Acts of service
- Words of affirmation
- Quality time
- Physical touch

“Each of us,” he says, *“has a primary love language, one of the five that speaks more deeply than the other four. If you don't speak the primary love language of the one you are trying to relate to, then he/she may not feel loved, even though you may be sincere.”*

So, here's a little bit of **homework**. Consider the love languages of those in your family and seek to communicate with them in that way, all with an interest of *“making love your aim.”*