

August 30, 2020
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1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Stop Being Nice: Be Loving

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

New Revised Standard Version

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.

I was the pastor at Krum United Methodist Church, just north of Denton, for 4 years and the first wedding that I officiated there I asked the couple if they wanted me to read this passage at their wedding. They said no, they wanted me to read the passage from James about your tongue getting you into trouble. It says in James 3, “By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.” The couple said that those verses were a reminder to them of how they wanted to speak to each other. Normally at weddings, you hear 1 Corinthians.

The writer of 1 Corinthians was trying to capture the depth and struggle to love fully. Love sounds like a mushy, fluffy word; but real love is anything but touchy-feely. It is hard work to really love others whether it is in a marriage, in your family, with a neighbor, a co-worker, or a friend. And it is **really** hard work to love yourself.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to do the hard work of sharing God’s love. There is a 2004 movie called *Saved!* starring Mandy Moore. It is a movie that shows us what **not** to do when sharing God’s love. In one of the scenes Mandy Moore throws a Bible at someone as she says, “I am filled with Christ’s love.” The person that Mandy Moore hits, picks up the Bible and says, “this is not a weapon.”

Popular songs tell us that love is a second hand emotion. Tina Turner asks us, “Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?” Dolly Parton said that she would always love. Elvis Presley sang that he couldn’t help falling in love. He said to take his hand and take his whole life too. Our society tells us that love is like Valentine’s Day. There are hearts and lots of pink decorations. Society tells us that love is always wonderful and happy.

Scripture tells us love is necessary in life and that it never ends. That love is patient, kind, bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. The Bible has all different kinds of love passages. God is love. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. 1st Corinthians 13 may be one of the most famous wedding passages, but it goes much deeper than romantic love.

Scripture uses four words for love. *Philos* is brotherly love. *Eros* is erotic love. *Storge* is a love between family members. *Agape* is the deepest love, defining God’s immeasurable love. In 1st Corinthians, Paul is writing about *agape* – the greatest love. *Agape* comes from God and when we share that love with others, we are Christlike. It is a matter of will rather than feeling.

Having that God love looks like silence when our words would hurt. It looks like patience

when others are abrupt. It looks like thoughtfulness for other's woes. Love is not merely a feeling. C.S. Lewis says love "is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit."¹ We have to learn to have that kind of love for ourselves and other people. It might look like having quiet time every morning to remember that we are loved. It might look like taking meals to someone who is experiencing homelessness. It might look like paying for the Starbucks order behind you in the drive thru lane.

How can you share God's love with yourself and with others this week? As followers of Jesus, we are called to do the hard work of sharing God's love.

1st Corinthians reminds us that if we lack love, we have no worth, no value because love is essential to have a life of faith. Love can't ask, "What's in it for me?" Love has to first look at the other person and ask, "What is best for you?" "What would help you?" Love's very nature is to seek out the needs of others. Love doesn't keep score of past better and worse moments and actions, but it looks the other way. Love gives the benefit of the doubt. When there is abuse, physically, emotionally or sexually, love means that we don't pass over something in silence. Love doesn't allow us to look the other way and ignore abuse in the name of keeping the peace of being nice. Love commands us to protect the victim. Love has to walk hand in hand with justice.

It's hard not to talk about love this week without the words of Clippers basketball coach Doc Rivers coming to mind. He said, "We're the ones getting killed. We're the ones getting shot. It's amazing why we keep loving this country, and this country does not love us back. I'm so often reminded of my color. It's just really sad. We got to do better. But we got to demand better." He was referring to the video of Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old Black man who was shot from behind seven times by a police officer in Kenosha, Wisconsin this week. Doc Rivers further said, "If you watch that video, you don't need to be Black to be outraged. You need to be American and outraged. We're the ones that need to be scared. We're the ones having to talk to every Black child. What white father has to give his son a talk about being careful if you get pulled over? It's just ridiculous. It just keeps going. There's no charges. Breonna Taylor, no charges, nothing. All we're asking is you live up to the Constitution. That's all we're asking for everybody, for everyone."

When we seek the good of the other, we find our own good. There is a circularity to love, starting from God's love of us which renews us and makes us whole, and that love moves until it gains expression toward others as a way of responding in thankfulness to God's love. Love can't be held, it can't be seized, it is realized fully *only* when it is being shared with someone else. This is a love that comes from God, claims us, and through us reaches out to others.

We are called to more than the sappy love in Hallmark movies or in your favorite movie soundtrack. *Agape* captures Christ's love. Love is supposed to build up others. How is your love becoming more like Christ's love and less like the world's expressions of love?

Paul introduces this whole passage of 1st Corinthians 13 by saying, "and now I will show you a more excellent way." We are called to stop being nice. God calls us to live a more excellent way, to show our neighbors and world *agape* love. This love will cost us our time and energy, but giving away God's love is its own reward.

One of my favorite John Wesley sayings is "When you don't have faith, preach it until you do." John Wesley, the first Methodist, had just returned from a missionary trip from England to Georgia in the U.S. The trip was a failure for him in both ministry and his personal life. He didn't convert any native peoples to Christianity and the woman he loved married another man.

¹ https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/True_Love_Reflections

John Wesley came back home to England completely discouraged, even doubting his belief in Christ. He was talking with his friend Peter Bohler who was a Moravian missionary. Moravians are a Protestant church from Germany. John Wesley had this question burning in his soul, "How can you preach to others if you don't have faith yourself?" John asked Peter if he should stop preaching, and Peter said, "By no means." Wesley asked him, "But what can I preach?" Peter answered, "Preach faith till you have it, and then, because you have it, you will preach faith."² The next day John Wesley shared about the love of Jesus to a man in prison on death row, and the man received Christ. Not long after that, Wesley had his Aldersgate experience where his heart was strangely warmed and he **knew** that he was loved by God. He experienced the grace of God in a profound way. Wesley said that he felt he did trust in Christ alone for his salvation. An assurance was given to him that Christ had taken away his sins and saved him from the law of sin and death.

How can I love when I don't feel love? How can I forgive when I don't feel forgiveness? Love until you feel love for the other person. Forgive until you feel forgiveness. Preach the love of Christ until you see the love of Christ in your life. Live a life of grace through faith until you see God's grace working in your life. It is an act of faith in Christ to love even when you *don't* feel it, but don't give up. "Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith." In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote "Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor, act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."

A therapist friend of mine once said she counsels others to "act as if". If you don't feel loved, act as if you are. If you don't love your husband, act as if you do. Miraculously the process of "acting as if" leads us to actually getting back in touch with positive feelings.

May we all work together to be kind, joyful, peaceful, and loving. May we go out and share the *agape* love of God with ourselves and with others. Amen.

Prayer: Loving, living God, be among us now. Show us your ways. Guide our steps. Live in us, that we may be people of steadfast hope and powerful giving. Help us hear your words, challenging us to give you all the things that are yours. Help us remember that all we are and all we have are gifts from you, gifts to be shared in service and love. Amen.

² <https://www.facebook.com/CornellMinistries/posts/619750291566835>