

"What is Love?" sermon, Feb. 2, 2025 Jerseyville Patty Wentworth

Nicole Adamson, a free-lance writer in Glenview, Illinois, writes about attending church with a friend while visiting Michigan. A young family with two children, a boy about 6 and a girl about 4, sat in front of them. The little girl was doing her best to sit still but wasn't quite succeeding, despite both parents' reminders. Several worshipers sitting nearby were showing their annoyance with her restlessness.

"Then, the reader began to read 1 Corinthians 13. I'd heard the passage so many times at weddings that I could practically recite it. Soon my attention drifted to the little girl.

"'Love is patient ... ' The parents continued to gesture, 'Shhh.' The mother picked the girl up off the floor and put her on the pew.

"'Love is kind ... ' The girl slid off the pew again, took her brother's face in her hands and gave him a kiss. He gave her a hug in return.

"'Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful ... ' The father placed his hand on his daughter's head and, again, asked her to stay still. She finally did, folding her legs and determinedly looking straight ahead.

"' ... love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things ... And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.'

"The little girl might not have understood one word of that lesson, but she knew, already, what it was all about." 1

1 —thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=8198. Retrieved August 12, 2009.

In last week's Epistle lesson, Paul tells his congregation that everyone has been blessed with gifts, talents to be used for the Kingdom of God. Paul tells them not to be comparing each others gifts, but to remember that each one is a gift from God. Paul ends with "But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way."²

and I think several of us thought, "what are the greater gifts? And what is the more excellent way?"

In Chapter 13, Paul tries to make his thoughts clearer.

"If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."³

If we have the ability of speaking well, but do it for your own glory, you are wasting your time. Your words will sound false, just noise, like 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"⁴

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³ 1 Corinthians 13:1 New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:2 New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

To be given the gift of Prophecy, of being able to have insight into the future, or to understand what others cannot, are amazing gifts. But if they are not done with love, they lack what is essential.

If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast^[a] but do not have love, I gain nothing".⁵

Doing good things, even costly sacrifices so that others will think highly of you, misses the point.

But what exactly is love?

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth."⁶

According to Paul, love isn't just ne feeling or action. Love is not what we do, it is why we do it.

52 times the Bible says that "God is love."

1 John tells us. "we love because God first loved us" ⁷

⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:3 New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by .⁶
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⁷ [1 John 4:19](#) New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Our love is shown in how we act,-with patience, and kindness.

The patient person does not get angry when the driver ahead of you is going too slow or your grandchild is taking too long picking up his toys. A patient person takes the time to listen to someone having a difficult day.

-Our love is seen when we don't spend time with jealous or bragging thoughts.

Proverb 27:2 states the matter bluntly: "Let another man praise you, and not with your own mouth."

"Love It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."⁸

Paul believes that Christians need to act out of love. And that love enables them to believe that God is with them, therefore they are filled with hope and able to endure trials and fears.

We not only hope, but we work for good, trusting God. We have strength to endure -difficult times.

⁸ 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. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end."⁹

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⁸1 Corinthians 13:7 New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
⁹1 Corinthians 13:8 -10 New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

There was a time in history when learned men insisted the world was square. Mariners were careful not to venture beyond charted areas for fear of dropping over the earth's edge. Available knowledge supported the belief that the earth was flat and human activity should be confined to the area bounded by the four corners. However, these primitive beliefs have long since "passed away" because of a more "perfect knowledge." 10

The Corinthians had many gifts and knowledge, but they didn't know everything yet. There is a higher knowing. When Christ returns to the Earth, everything will be made clear.

Ecclesiastes said, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." 11

Paul is looking ahead to the end of time.

The spiritual gifts we use to minister to others will one day will come to an end." Prophecies, speaking in tongues, knowledge and other gifts will no longer be needed, but love will continue - because God is everlasting.

¹¹ 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." ¹² For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, 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." 12

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¹⁰ Len Sweet Sermons Online ¹¹Ecclesiastes 3:1 New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

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Children often think of themselves first. Their reasoning is not like that of an adult. My grandson Jacob loves to play games with me. The only problem is that he makes up the rules of the game and doesn't tell me what they are!

Unlike the mirrors we have today, those in Paul's time were very unclear. "dimly, or in a riddle" We know God from reading His Word and from listening to Jesus' teaching. But we will not fully understand until Christ comes again,

In this same letter to the Corinthians, Paul frequently refers to humanity's "imperfect knowledge," and in 8:2, 3, says, 'Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge,³ but anyone who loves God is known by him.' 13

. And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love." 14 ,While many things will no longer be needed, Paul assures us that three things will remain forever-faith, hope and love.

The writer Drew Duke recalled from her childhood her second grade **Valentine's Day** party. Several **days** earlier a big decorated box had been placed at the front of the room by the teacher. It had a slit in the top. Each student had been invited to bring **valentines** addressed to friends and to drop them into the box.

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141 Corinthians 13:13 New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Then on **Valentine's Day**, one student was designated by the teacher as the postman to distribute the cards. Earlier that week Drew's mother had bought a package of 35 **valentine** cards. Drew asked her, "Why did you buy so many?" She replied, "So you can give one to each person in your class." "No ma'am," Drew said, "We don't do it that way. We only give cards to our special friends. I only need four cards. I don't even like some of the people in my class." Her mother said nothing else. Drew signed four cards and put the names on the front.

Everybody was excited when the **Valentine's Party** began. The girl designated as postman began calling the names and handing out the cards. Some very popular children got bunches of cards. Drew heard her name called quite often and was having a wonderful time. But then she became aware that the little girl sitting in front of her had received no cards. Her head was drooping lower and lower. Then suddenly the postman called this little girl's name and delivered to her one **valentine**. Her face lit up like morning sunshine. She tore open that **valentine**, hurrying to see who had cared enough to send it. Drew looked over her shoulder and saw that it was signed "Your secret admirer." The little girl smiled and glanced around the room, wondering who it could be. "But", said Drew, "I knew who it was but I didn't tell. I recognized my mother's handwriting." Her mother had obtained a class roster and had sent a card to every child in the class. Drew learned from her mother what her mother learned from God: that God's love reaches even the unlovely, and everybody is invited to God's party! 15

Jesus said "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself."16

15 **Bill Bouknight** Sermons.com

16 "[Luke 10:27](#) New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.