

It was about this time six years ago, when Sarah and I were planning for our upcoming wedding that summer. We had more than reached the point in our relationship that we realized our respective interests and personalities and comfort levels would make it easier for Sarah just to take care of the reception and I, more so, the worship portion. Of course, we, still, made sure to include the other on various decisions; except one that I was *not* going to back off of whatsoever: we will *not* hear First Corinthians 13 read at our wedding!

It had already been done and done and done, to the point that the guests, basically, tune Paul out altogether. They roll their eyes that they have to sit through the same rendition on love for the umpteenth time at such a ceremony. Not to mention, as a pastor, I wanted something unique, because I knew Paul did not write that passage to be used at a wedding anyway (obviously, we have to overlook the fact that there was no portion of Scripture that was specially written for our wedding thousands of years later, but that's besides the point).

Regardless, no matter how much I tried to keep First Corinthians 13 miles upon miles away from the sanctuary that day, the words still

came to life, nonetheless. Because, you see, Sarah and I had to exhibit a bit of the “love is patient” idea almost immediately, when we walked out of the church building, after the worship had concluded. We got into this old Studebaker car that we were meant to ride away in for a short trip around the town. Instead, the vintage vehicle decided to not start at all. “Love is patient,” so Paul tells us, at least.

Sarah, especially, had to practice the “love is kind” portion that day. She didn’t get too much sleep the night before (as if what was happening the next day was a big deal or something), and I’m sure not everything went according to plan with bridesmaids and hair-do’s galore, not to mention all the pictures to take before the ceremony. Through it all, love is, still, meant to be kind, even in the frustrating circumstances of life.

Paul even says that love is not meant to be irritable or resentful. Now the one who was more than entitled to be exactly those things was not either of the soon-to-be married couple; it was, instead, my uncle, who, also, serves as a pastor, and presided over Communion for our wedding. Except, as John was about to commune us up-front; Sarah,

needed the gluten-free wafers, which were not right behind my uncle on the altar. They were already down front in case any of the guests needed them. So, when, John, being the patient and kind-loving guy that he was, walked down the steps to get that one gluten-free wafer; he ended up tripping on those same steps on the way back. Thankfully, he wasn't hurt. Communion still happened. The party went on as planned. And through it all, John was still all love with no irritability or resentment thrown in, as would be the normal course of human action.

Except, one of the moments I remember most from that day, when I felt this most humbling form of awe-inspiring love that Paul attempted to drive home when he penned what we now know as First Corinthians 13: it happened when one of my sisters lead the prayers, and we got to the petition that offered thanks to God for the people who have gone before us. When she got to the names of our grandparents, all of whom had died before, she burst into tears. Because, in the end, *they* were the ones who taught us First Corinthians 13 with how they lived, how they loved others, how they loved us all the way to their end.

After all, we can hear and read these words countless times in our life. We can get to the point of being able to quote it before whomever family or close friend of the wedding party starts to speak from the lectern: “love is patient, love is kind,” and on and on. Except, we need to *see* it too. We need a reason to believe all these things. We need some kind of living motivation to want to, in any way, bear all the things this life can throw at us. We need some tangible transformational reality to make us think there’s anything worth hoping for, in the end. We need something beyond ourselves to endure this life with any semblance of the very love Paul speaks of, all the way to our end.

Hopefully, we get lucky or blessed enough to witness that through close family and friends, sisters and brothers in Christ; many of whom, for Sarah and myself, were gathered there that day (and not just because of Sarah’s perfect reception she had planned, but because they loved us). And yet, we know that the ultimate tangible transformational hope and encapsulation of Paul’s love does not come through us, but through the One Who loved us to the point of His own death and beyond.

The most important thing Sarah and I did that day was serve Communion to our guests, because no matter how much pomp and circumstance goes into weddings nowadays, no one was there to worship us. We were there to worship God, Who still has more than enough love leftover to keep on bringing it to life. So, we served that tangible transformational reality in the bread and wine, in the body and blood of our Lord, the encapsulation of a love that doesn't just make us feel good through all the times our patience is tried or the moments of irritation and frustration galore.

This is the love that defines us as children of God, the ultimate title beyond husband and wife, pastor and nurse, joyful and grieving, hope-filled and hopeless. Through it all, God's love has won us over to make us God's own coveted daughters and sons. And God has made a promise greater than any vow made at a wedding: that nothing that ever happens in this life will take away God's love for us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. God has *vowed* that to us through life and death and into eternity. And for that Greatest News of all, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen.