

“Love Is a Verb”

February 3, 2019

First Christian Church

Scripture Lesson: 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

When I first graduated from my schooling, there were too many times when “I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child.” What I mean by that is I had knowledge. In my schooling I gained knowledge in how the Bible was written and who wrote it. I had knowledge in how the Bible was put together and what translations were more accurate than others. I knew of innate conflicts between the 1st and 2nd chapters of Genesis as well as some timeline discrepancies between John and the other gospels. I had knowledge. I had put in three years of schooling with professors and peers working even harder than I had to make sure I gained this knowledge. I knew I was right. Therefore, I wielded my knowledge like a sword. It didn’t matter if you liked what I had to say or not. The knowledge I had was real. I was right and you were going to have to deal with it. “I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child” because I did not have love. True, Amy and I had not gotten together yet at that point, but that is not what I am talking about when I say I did not have love. Americans generally think of love as an emotion. Sometimes we mix it up with attraction, lust or affection, but mostly we think of love as an emotion. But the Bible thinks of love as a set of behaviors. Love is a verb. It is something we do.

In some ways our English Bible handicaps us with its translation of 1 Corinthians 13. It says, “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude.” It makes it sound like Paul is trying to define what love is for people. “Love is not irritable or resentful.” But when you go back to the Greek, the original language in which Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, there is none of this romanticized, abstract language. Paul is not interested in defining what love is, but rather what love does. He doesn’t say, “love is patient”, he says, “love shows patience”, which means when you are impatient or lose your patience, you got no love. He doesn’t say, “Love is kind”, he says, “act with kindness”. He says if you are acting out of jealousy or bragging, that aint’ love. This center section of 1 Corinthians 13 gives us 15 action verbs in a row that have to do with what love does and does not do. Half of those tell us what love does: be patient, be kind, rejoice in the truth, bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. When we do these things, we are the loving people Jesus models and empowers us to be. The other half tell us what love does not do: do not envy, do not boast, do not be arrogant, do not be rude, do not seek your own way, do not be irritable, do not be resentful, and do not rejoice in wrongdoing. When we do these things, we are flaunting our immaturity. We are speaking like a child, thinking like a child, and reasoning like a child. More simply put, you are acting like a baby.

Hopefully you have picked up by now that Biblical love has nothing to do with how you feel. It is all about what you do. Remember, Paul is writing this letter to a congregation that is on the verge of splitting apart because each faction wants things done their way. Those with the gift of healing want worship to focus on healing. Those with the gift of teaching want it to be about teaching. Those with the gift of speaking in tongues, want worship to center on helping others

speak to God directly in divine language and so on. In church board meetings and parking lot discussions, I bet there had been some hurtful words exchanged and some major hurt feelings. People's passions have been stepped on and their understandings of God challenged again and again. I suspect many of the church folks didn't really like each other anymore. To this the Bible says, it doesn't matter how you feel about the other person. It doesn't matter how you feel about yourself. It doesn't matter if your skin starts to crawl when you have to be in the same room with that other person. How you feel is not the definition of love. Jesus is bigger and stronger than all that. The same Spirit that gave you the ability to sing or preach or pray or give or teach or have faith in the first place; is the same spirit that calls you and empowers you to "earnestly desire the higher and greater gifts." It "shows you the more excellent way." That more excellent way is maturity – it is the way of Biblical love. Know that real love, Biblical love, true love does not always feel good. True love is not measured by how good it makes us feel, but in its capacity to experience tension and disagreement without division because we always act in loving ways toward one another. It doesn't matter if the other is a complete stranger or the person we share our entire life with, strive for the greater gifts and the greatest of these is love. Love is a busy, active thing that never ceases to work, but is always finding ways to express itself for the good of others.

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child." When the game didn't go my way, when it didn't make me feel good, I took my ball and went home. When I had knowledge, I wielded it like a sword. But "when I became a man, I gave up childish ways." I learned to be a loving person. I hope that the knowledge I possess is used more as a tool than a weapon, pulled out at the appropriate time and used to build others up as opposed to prove them wrong.

Knowledge, administration, hospitality, service, discernment; these are all amazing gifts from God through the Holy Spirit; but without love they are just a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal, and a wailing baby. For the greatest of these is love.

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