

Sunday January 30, 2022 Epiphany 4 Jesus' Call to Love

I Corinthians 13:1-13 Luke 4:21-30

“Love is all around us”. “Love makes the world go ‘round’”. “What the world needs now” and “Love, Love, Love”. These are all songs about love recorded by different artists and yet each has a story to tell about what love means to the writer. If one googles “love” as a word in songs you will get more than 1.3 billion possibilities. These songs reflect the different kinds of love that we know exist. Love is experienced between oneself and another being or object. For many of us the love we experience is in how we understand what being in relationship with others is about. Just think about the words of the songs that become ear worms to you- what do they mean when we state them aloud or even as a prayer? Love is all around us—but we have to look for love and to find it means taking a risk, putting ourselves out there and knowing that love does test us from time to time.

A favourite quote whose author is unknown states: *If you love something, let it go. If it comes back to you, it's yours forever. If it doesn't, then it was never meant to be.* This quote is speaking of the most fundamental rule of the universe. Love is not owned and cannot be taken. It can only be given. This quote talks about mutual love and of the only valid test which is If you love someone, you have to give the other the freedom to choose for itself.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth as this faith community needed support in its struggles to figure out who they were and their mission as followers of Jesus. The people were unsure of what it meant to live loving others like Jesus did and so this passage from I Corinthians 13 known as the love chapter describes the love that the Christian community should have amongst themselves. Often this passage is used for weddings as a blessing on a couple as they marry, but it also describes the love we are all to share in faith. But what is love?

The Greek language describes love in seven different ways and so for us to understand what love is we need to reflect upon each kind of love for a clear understanding. EROS is

often what is shown in movies and television soap operas- the intense sexual desires. PHILIA good friendship love strong trust and mutual respect—like Jesus and his disciples. STORGE love which binds a parent to a child for all of life. PRAGMA which is an enduring love that is experienced between people long married and still lighting up when they see each other. PHILAUTIA is the kind of selfish love that calls people into see themselves as more important than the other in any relationship. LUDAS love is often seen when people first meet and they tease each other or are playful and flirting in some ways. But the most important kind of love is AGAPE and that love that is unconditional no matter what happens the relationship remains strong and forgiving.

Paul is teaching the people in the Corinthian church the importance of love of any kind- for without it we are nothing. He is also stating that we will gain nothing even if we give away everything but boast about doing so. So what is Paul telling us as he describes love- patient, kind, not jealous, nor boastful or arrogant or rude. He is describing the way we are to relate with others in the church, outside the church- where we live, work, play and go to school. And how we are to interact with people when we get to see people again in more social settings! We are to be kind—I find it interesting that in the last couple of years that store announcements have a voice telling us about the current covid19 safety protocols in place and a reminder to be kind to each other. Other places have signs posted which read: “Kindness goes a long way in receiving service. Please be patient.” Still other places- have signs that ask the regular questions about contact, wear a mask and beside these—are remember to be kind.

We might ask—isn't this what we are taught when little- to be kind—and show love? One can only imagine why some companies have had to print these posters for their businesses- staff people must have been through a lot in these months! But love includes more ways of being expressed than being kind. We need to realize that love never ends and that it is the greatest of faith, hope and love. Just where did Paul get this idea of love to share with the new

churches that were being established? From Jesus. For Jesus taught his disciples what love is through his actions, through his way of speaking, through his welcoming of others around him and in how he spoke and what he said. His message to the world was love—from God, given through him for the sake and purpose of life eternal. AGAPE love—unconditional.

We might find this teaching in contrast to what occurred to Jesus after he read in the synagogue the teaching from Isaiah about his life's purpose. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." When the people realized the meaning of these words and what Jesus said following this—Today this scripture has been filled in your hearing. And grew angry—cutting him down—this can't be true—he is Joseph's son, the carpenter's boy; how come he said this- it's blasphemy; how dare he say this! But Jesus answered them and told them of the prophets Elijah and Elisha and how they had healed people. This made the crowd more angry as he tells these stories of Elijah and the famine and Elisha healing Naaman—stories of miracles in their Hebrew history. But instead of receiving him as they first did at meeting in the synagogue, they grew angry and wanted to kill him. Yet we might ask? Wasn't the synagogue where he grew up and nurtured him and received him? Where was the love in these moments? Jesus' revelation as the son of God to his hometown crowd was not filled with love— but fear. Fear from the people to accept Jesus as the Messiah, fear of Jesus to be killed then even though he was just starting the preparation time before his death and fear of all involved as to how this would play out in time.

Sometimes we wonder about what happens in the church or wherever people gather for a common purpose— whether for work, volunteer or fun. We all come together for the common good but are we really focused on the *philia* love between friends or *philanthia*—self love and what we can get out of it? Maybe there are times when the church has the fun and playful love,

but often we are more like the pragmatic love of enduring caring people. And when someone new comes in they 'rock the ship' too much and are ousted. But what are we looking for as we share in faith together? We strive for love to be experienced and shared as Christ taught and expressed by Paul. Through acts of kindness and being patient as well as being truthful we can experience love. And this kind of love lasts. No matter what the situation- love is there. This is because God loves his creation and he created us to love him. Through time, it was not enough reason to love God so in his deep love for us God sent his Son Jesus Christ. Through Jesus we learn love—unconditional and committed love. Because Jesus reached out to all who would follow him and died for them He was the Messiah who would save then and still does today through the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught us how to love and expressed it to those who heard from the cross that his purpose was finished. He did what God had called him to do- love others without counting the cost. He did this for us- so we need not be punished for sin- but forgiven.

This is the message of Christ's love—faith, hope and love—all of these came to us in the birth of the infant Jesus. But what is significant is the need for us to express our love to God for his agape love for us—God loves us unconditionally. Therefore we too should love others the same. Jesus' call to love is his call to each of us on how to serve Him each and every day through all the relationships we have- from strangers, to acquaintances to family- we are to do so with love. And we know that there are times it is difficult to do this—but to love also means to be patient and gentle for if love is given away—it will come back stronger in the end. This is the message of God's love for us—given in Jesus our Saviour and taught to us as we share in faith and with hope.

Let us pray: God of grace we pray that through your gift of unconditional love we may learn fully to trust you and each other. Love offered and received has no price. But to truly love means doing so without counting the cost. Hear our prayers we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen.