

“ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE”

Script for Sermon Preached by the Rev. Douglas Clark, September 11, 2016

Ordinary 24 – HCC, 9:00 a.m.; FCCH, 10:30 a.m. – Rally Day

“In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, diversity; in all things, charity”

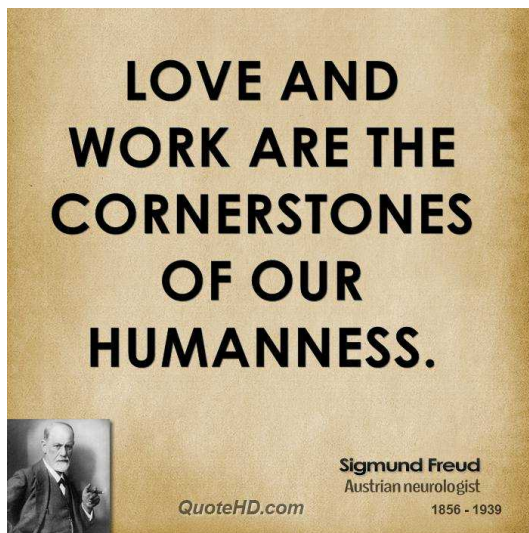
Scripture Reading – I Corinthians 13:1-13 (NRSV)

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. Love 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.



By the middle of the first century of the common era, about twenty years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, there were Christian congregations scattered around the Mediterranean, from Jerusalem to Rome. But the people who gathered in these various congregations did not call themselves Christians. They called themselves people of the Way, by which they meant the way of Jesus.

One of these early congregations was founded by the Apostle Paul, when he traveled to the city of Corinth. Corinth was an ethnically and religiously diverse city. It was “a place of hybrid identities, where Greek culture, language, and religion were reshaped in a variety of ways by Roman colonization.”¹ The Corinthian congregation was similar in some ways to Pentecostal congregations in today's world. There had been an outpouring of spiritual gifts among some of the believers who made up this diverse congregation in a diverse city.

When the believers came together for meetings, whether for worship or for business, those meetings were often characterized by chaos and conflict, precisely because of the diversity of spiritual gifts. They sent a messenger to Paul describing their situation and seeking his guidance. Chapters 12 to 14 of this actual letter to a specific congregation comprise Paul's guidance about the exercise of spiritual gifts in that congregation. But these ancient words of wisdom resonate with us in our time as well.

In Chapter 12, Paul emphasized that these “manifestations of the spirit” were “given for the common good” (12:7). He uses the image of the human body as an example for the congregation. As the human body has many “members” (hands, eyes, ears, feet, etc.), so too in the community of believers “there are many members, yet one body” (12:20). And “God has so arranged the body,... that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another” (12:24-25). In this body, “if one member suffers, all suffer together...; if one member is honored, all rejoice together...” (12:26).

Paul concludes chapter 12 with this admonition: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”

That “still more excellent way” is of course the way of love, which is what chapter 13 is all about. The context of this chapter helps us to see that regardless of how popular these verses are as a wedding reading, this text is not about romantic love or married love. It's about mutual care and respect in the community of faith. It's all about building up both the members and the community as a whole.

¹<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/places/main-articles/corinth.aspx>.

Throughout I Corinthians 13, the Greek word for love is *αγαπη* (ἄΓΑΠΗ, | ΜΕΛΑΡΚΥ | ἱ ἄΓΑΠΗ-ΕΜΦ). “*Agape* is the term that defines God's immeasurable, incomparable love for humankind.” As in: God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son. And by extension, *αγαπη* is the term that defines the kind of relationship Jesus' followers are called to have with one another. As in: by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have *αγαπη* love for one another.

As we embark together on our second year of shared ministry, may we remain attentive to the *αγαπη* love song of I Corinthians 13, which is an excellent “model of respect and tolerance for our common life together in the body of Christ.”² You are two congregations, but you also have a “common life together.” You are no longer independent, and you are becoming interdependent.

In the months and years ahead, as you make this transition from independence to interdependence, you will need to exercise *αγαπη* love for each other: Love that is patient and kind; love that is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love that does not insist on its own way; that is not irritable or resentful; that does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

²<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=1cac7963-1287-431b-8382-50e3f64cd843%40sessionmgr105&vid=1&hid=116>.