

Luke 4:38-44 The Love Chapter
1 Corinthians 13:1-13
February 2, 2025

The month of February is the least favorite month of the year. It is also the shortest, with only twenty-eight days except when there is a leap year, which happened last year.

It is an in-between kind of month. Winter has come in force in December and January and people are ready for spring, but they have to wait through February. It is halfway between the solstice and the equinox; the days are not as short as December but Daylight Savings is still weeks away. There is less snow, knock on wood, but it is not warm enough to go outside without a coat, at least not around here.

Surveys are consistent that it is the least favorite month. Only three percent of the population claims it as their favorite. It is not fall or spring or summer, and it is not December, which has Christmas, making it the favorite, and the only winter month that does not come at the bottom of the list. It has the Super Bowl. Other than that all it has to speak for it is Groundhog's Day, which is today by the way. It is a strange day, when supposedly, if it is cloudy, then spring comes early.

And it has Valentine's Day, which is a celebration of love. Of course, it is a particular kind of love, the romantic kind, and there is nothing wrong with that. It

gives people a way to break up the drabness of things as winter slowly passes.

Today, we find the epistle reading from 1 Corinthians 13, the, "Love" chapter, also a celebration of love, although a different kind of love. And it is Communion day, which celebrates that different kind of love, to which we give our attention.

In many ways people have tried to convey their convictions about their experience and understanding of God. In the Old Testament, one can find many different expressions. God as Creator, as righteous and just, rewarding and punishing the ones who do good and the ones who do evil.

We find God demanding obedience over sacrifice even when the instructions are hard. On Sinai, God comes in a bush on fire but never consumed, and later in a cloud with lightning and thunder. Theologically these presentations have become associated with the intimidating idea of the Wrath of God.

Of course, the historical context for all these ideas is the decline and fall of Israel as a nation. By the time of Jesus, the Israel had been conquered five times; the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. If I seem redundant in mentioning all these tragedies, it is because I believe it is important to remember the context that produced the Bible.

And yet, it is the conviction of the psalmists and prophets and priests and historians of Israel that God

is merciful to the point of inner repenting. God is a loving God. They are redundant several times over that God's steadfast love endures forever, and that God's love offers protection for the faithful and for the nation; forgiveness, provision, and promise.

In the gospels, which also quote from the Jewish Bible extensively, we learn that it is important to accept the primacy of love in all our relations; with God, with each other, with our neighbors, and even with our enemies.

We can see Jesus acting with empathy and compassion, restraining judgment, with an eye towards sacrifice, as when in the Gospel of John we read, "there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for a friend. We can detect the high regard which Jesus holds for all the people he meets, from the Gentile to the downtrodden to the Rich Young Man.

His teaching and healing ministries stand out as expressions of an unselfish love; one that can only be called divine. We are way past Valentine's Day. In the gospel text for the day, he is found healing people, from Peter's mother-in-law to all sorts of folks with various kinds of sickness.

We see Jesus withdrawing into a private life, and concerned also that he takes the time for the preaching the good news, which means that Jesus was concerned with spiritual as well as physical health.

In 1 John, we are told that God *is* love, and on the cross we find that love in its finest form, "God has demonstrated his love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

But it is in 1 Corinthians that we are given a description of what love means. Paul insists that love is a spiritual gift, not only so, but it is the most important one. It is the highest rule. And unlike the other gifts, which are given to some but not others, fitting with the illustration of the body, love is universally given. It is the summary gift that unites them all. Without it, all the other gifts, all the other relationships, all the other teachings, everything we value, are reduced to meaninglessness.

The paragraph Paul has written stands out among all the single paragraphs ever set down to paper. He wrote that love is patient and kind, it does not envy or boast, is not proud. It is neither rude or self-seeking. We should pause here, because as time goes by, both in the church and the larger culture, rudeness and excessive self-concern are rampant, and increasingly seen as acceptable, maybe even necessary. They are among the necessary traits to nurture if one is to get ahead, even somehow, if one is to do God's bidding.

These ideas could not stand in larger contradiction to the gospel message. Something precious is lost when we give in to selfishness and give up our manners, something that I believe more than offsets any gain achieved in their absence.

This remarkable paragraph goes on to say that love is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrong. As long as we are taking pauses, we could do worse than to take one here. People often, to the contrary, seem pretty good at this kind of accounting. Almost everyone who is angry believes that if it righteous, anger, it is justified. It is always easy to be convinced that one's anger is righteous.

Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Imbedded in this idea is the beautiful notion of somehow being against the kinds of things that bring harm to people and their communities, without being *against any of the people*.

Love always protects, always trusts, hopes and perseveres. And in the three word refrain that sums it all up, we are told that, "*love never fails.*"

Paul goes on to admonish that the world is headed towards the full revealing of God, though presently we live by faith, see through a dark glass. He speaks of this full revealing as requiring a maturity that an immature faith fails to understand. Among other things as we grow in our faith, we can see that the other gifts are not so important. As a matter of fact, they are going away.

As a matter of fact, nothing much is really all that important in our lives. In the end, there are really only three important things; faith, hope and love. In a pragmatic technological world one would never suspect that technology, or government, or money,

pleasure, or comfort, or religion, or when one comes right down to it, not even equality, or freedom, or justice, are really important, at least not primarily important.

Their importance is meaningful only if it is subordinate to, under the umbrella of God's love. Their importance is all wrapped up in the realization and acknowledgment that they are not important, do not matter.

What does matter is faith, and hope, and love, even in February. Seek them, nurture them, they are to be found in Christ.

And the greatest of these is, of course, *love*.

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