

1 Corinthians 13
Don't Sound Like a Clanging Cymbal!
WRCoB 5.10.20

One of our current family activities
During our time together at home
Has been to read through
The "Little House on the Prairie Series."

We read it aloud to one another before bed.

Judith commented on how calm and peaceful
Laura Ingalls' mother acted in the face of hardships.

In spite of the extreme difficulties of life on the prairie
Shut in through countless Dakota blizzards

Heating their home with hay when the coal ran out
And eating the last of their stored food

She remained emotionally collected, patient and kind
And continually hopeful.

We both agreed that during this pandemic
We could use a little more of what she had.

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When I read down through 1st Corinthians 13
And read the list of characteristics
Loving people are supposed to have

I am humbled and know I am a piece of work . . .
A work in progress.

And not only me, but most of us
Managing a way through this crisis.

Love is, after all, patient and kind
Neither attributes in unlimited supply these days.

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Today is Mother's Day
A day we express our love for the mothers in our lives.

We place a mothers' love
A notch above other kinds of love.

Wonder why that is?

It is because a mother's love
More closely resembles God's love
A love sacrificial in nature.

Today's passage is most often associated with
Weddings and rightly so.

But the Apostle Paul wasn't writing a wedding homily.

He was writing to a church that had lost its focus.

And whether it is to admonish a church
To instruct newlyweds
Or to celebrate Mother's Day

The chapter in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth
May have something to say to us today.

According to Robert Johnson

From his book

The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden

The Sanskrit language has 96 words for love

Ancient Persian has 80

The Greeks have 3 words

And the English language?

One measly little ole word.

What might that tell you about how we use the word?

Well, besides the word awesome

Love has got to be

The most abused and overused word

In the English language.

We use it to describe everything

From our love of God to our love of pizza.

I mean, can I really use the same word

To express my feelings for my wife

And how I feel about a grilled T-bone?

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One other thing it tells you . . .

When translating the Bible from Greek to English

We are limited in conveying the true meaning.

The New Testament Greek has three words for love.

Eros—romantic or physical love
As in our word erotic.

Phlios—the Greek word meaning love for a sibling
As in Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love

And Agape—a word that means unconditional love.

The word love in this morning’s passage is agape.

Agape love goes beyond an emotional feeling
Beyond something passive to something active.

Simply put, agape love is a love that places
Someone else’s needs before our own.

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Our selected passage for Mother’s Day is 1 Corinthians 13
Commonly called the “Love Chapter.”

These are words written by the Apostle Paul
To the church in Corinth.

In it, Paul describes the necessity of love
The character of love
And the permanence of love.

What Paul doesn’t do is describe the feelings
Associated with love and with good reason.

Feelings are fleeting and unreliable.

Today's world speaks of falling in love and falling out of love
As if love was as unpredictable as the weather!

Love is not temperamental! People are!

Love is steadfast and permanent.

Paul says that love never fails.

Why is it then that relationships fail?

Relationships fail when they are based
On the self-seeking, self-gratifying, self-absorbing thing
People call love today.

Today's world considers love
Something that is "all about me!"

But this is not the love Paul describes in this passage.

Paul never says anything
About the "what's in it for me" kind of love.

Note again the character of love as Paul describes it.

Love is patient and kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

The true character of love is not in being filled, but in filling
Not in gratification but in gratifying
Not in being served but in serving.

Love that is self-seeking fails.

It is in the giving not the receiving of love
That one experiences the deep quality
That God meant love to have.

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The Bible tells us that God is love.

So when we love truly, we participate in God and with God.

By loving God, we will more fully love one another.

Richard McBrien a Catholic priest writes:

If love is the soul of Christian existence, it must be at the heart of every other Christian virtue. Thus, for example, justice without love is legalism; faith without love is ideology; hope without love is self-centeredness; forgiveness without love is self-abasement; fortitude without love is recklessness; generosity without love is extravagance; care without love is mere duty; fidelity without love is servitude.

Every virtue is an expression of love. No virtue is really a virtue unless it is permeated, or informed, by love.

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Our **faith** in Jesus as Lord

Our **hope** in Jesus as Savior

Are foundational to Christianity.

But if we do not couch it all in **love**

Paul says we begin to sound like a clanging cymbal.

He ends his chapter, **So now faith, hope, and love abide
These three, but the greatest of these is love.**

Faith, hope, and love are three aspects of faith.

But, according to Paul

Don't hold them equilaterally.

They must be prioritized.

If one needs to shine above the others, it has to be love.

The great Bible commentator, William Barclay says

More people have been brought into the church by the kindness of real Christian love than by all the theological arguments in the world and more people have been driven from the church by the hardness and ugliness of so-called Christianity than by all the doubts in the world.

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I admit, at times, I have the urge

To sound like a noisy gong.

The pandemic has tried the patience of us all.

But the Bible tells us that love is patient and kind.

Patience and kindness

Two qualities essential to conveying agape love.

And now, perhaps more than any other period in our lives
A little more patience and kindness is a must
As we navigate through this pandemic.

Patience, as we continue to practice
Restrictions that limit our freedom
Hopefully lessening the pandemic's impact.

And kindness, as we relate to one another
In our homes
Our work settings
And the grocery store.

And when we are tempted and our patience is tried
When we start sounding like clanging cymbals

Remember, love is not temperamental.
We are.

Agape love is determined
To put someone else's needs before our own.

Frederick Buechner writes

In the Christian sense, love is not primarily an emotion, but an act of the will.

When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he is not telling us to love them in the sense of responding to them with a cozy emotional feeling.

On the contrary, he is telling us to love our neighbors in the sense of being willing to work for their well-being even if it means sacrificing our own well-being to that end

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Now I don't know how you'll celebrate Mother's Day.

Or if you'll celebrate Mother's Day at all.

But the essential qualities of love

That we so often find in mothers

Are essentials we should all be working on.

Two that stand out for me is patience and kindness.

And we would do well to remember that love

Is not somehow an emotional, passive state

But an active expression of putting others before ourselves.

Patience and kindness goes a long way towards that.

Laura Ingalls' mother had it.

So can we.

And so, the next time you're sounding like a noisy gong

Actively strive to overcome it

With help from God's Holy Spirit

And a fierce determination to be better than that.

How bout it?