

1 Corinthians 13
Don't Be a Clanging Cymbal!
WRCoB 5.5.24

It has been noted in verses 4-7

That one can easily substitute the word "Jesus"
For the word "love"
Something like this.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NRSV

⁴ Jesus is patient; Jesus is kind; Jesus is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. Jesus does not insist on his own way; he is not irritable; he keeps no record of wrongs; ⁶ Jesus does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ Jesus bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Jesus and love are interchangeable
Because God is love.

Without Jesus, it's impossible to know
God's character
Or the characteristics of love

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Today's passage is commonly known as the Love Chapter.

It is often associated with weddings and rightly so.

What better passage for instruction then this
For couples beginning their life together.

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

He wasn't preparing to officiate a wedding in Corinth.

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

But whether it is to admonish a church
Or to instruct newlyweds

Chapter 13 of Paul's letter to the Corinthians
Has something to say to us today.

As I said last week
The church in Corinth had some major issues

And Paul's letter seeks to address some of the them.

In chapter 12
Paul raises an issue associated with spiritual gifts.

Apparently among those who are spiritually gifted
There seemed to be some sort of rivalry going on

He acknowledges that there are a variety of spiritual gifts
But the same Spirit
Each meant for the common good

Paul argues that no gift is any better than any other.

He then uses the analogy of a human body
Being made up of different parts.

None of the individual parts are any less important
Than any of the others.

And he closes chapter 12 with these thoughts.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 NRSV

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work powerful deeds? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

The more excellent way, of course
Is what Paul writes in the following chapter.

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Paul is not happy
With the immature behavior exhibited by the church.

Is this how you want the world to see you
Bickering and carrying on?

Is this how you show the world God's love
By fighting amongst yourselves?

Those of you who speak in tongues
Without the presence love
You sound like clanging cymbals.

Those of you who show off your prophetic powers
And who are extremely knowledgeable about things

If you don't do it in love, you're missing the point.

If you have faith that can move mountains
But you don't do it in love

If you do things for the good of others
But do not have love

If you call yourself a Christian but have not love
You're nothing.

Don't be a clanging cymbal
Waxing eloquent the things of God

Or

Matthew 6:7 NIV

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

It begins to sound like clanging cymbals

Instead, do everything in love.

If it can't be done in love, don't do it.

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Paul then, defines the qualities of agape love
In verses 4-7

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 unreliable, like the weather.

But here's the thing, love is not temperamental!
People are!

Love is not fleeting and irresponsible!
People are!

Love is not deceptive or manipulative
People are!

Love is steadfast and immovable.

Paul says love never fails.
But why are the Corinthians behaving like this?

Because their relationships are based
On the self-seeking, self-gratifying, self-absorbing thing
People call love.

This is not love.
Love is not "all about me!"

Paul never says anything
About the "what's in it for me" thing people call love

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
Not in being loved but in loving

Love that is self-seeking fails.

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

Simply put, agape love is a love that places
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 neighbor
He doesn't mean to give our neighbor
A bouquet of roses and a box of chocolates.
To write love letters every week.

No!

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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In the first letter of John he writes that God is love.

It is for this reason we can substitute in verses 4-7
The word Jesus for the word love.

Because Jesus is love

His characteristics are the same as love.

So, when we love

The way Paul describes love

We participate in God and with God.

Because love is the heart of the gospel.

Not prophesying, gifts of healing, nor any other spiritual gift.

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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Paul's message is a timely one for WRCoB.

Because as our church grows and diversifies

And the status quo begins to rock and roll

And the "we've never done it that way before"

Collides with "Let's try it this way."

When issues arise out of our theological, sociological
Ecclesiological and ethnical differences

If we're not careful, we'll start sounding
Like clanging cymbals.

Please don't be a clanging cymbal!

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Paul say at the end of chapter 12
That we are to strive for the greater gifts.

These greater gifts are faith, hope, and love
These three abide.

But they are not equal, Paul says.

One stands above the rest.

One virtue shines above the others. 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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If all we have ever done in this world
Is to love one another unconditionally
And do so in Jesus name

Then we have done more
Than we could ever have done
By clanging our cymbals of religiosity.

Paul says to the church in Galatia

Galatians 5:14 NIV

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Paul goes on to lists the fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23 CEB

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this.

We might argue politics or theology
The right way to worship
Church government
Proper church attire

But at the end of the day
We will recognize our differences
Embrace our diversity
And love each other just the same.

Because if the church can't do it
Whose Lord is Jesus Christ
Then how do we expect the kingdom to come?

I pray that one day

The world will look at our church

And say this about us.

“Would you look at that bunch of misfits

But oh, look at how they love each other.”

Colossians 3:12-15 NIV

¹² Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let this be our benediction (after the singing of our last song)

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.