

Love, Indeed

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

January 30, 2022

First Presbyterian Church, Luling

It's a rite of passage for lots of 16 year olds: going to the Department of Public Safety to take the drivers' license test. It's the end of driver's ed, which at least for me involved a written test and then class time and most exciting, driving around town with some fellow students and an instructor. Truth be told, I already knew how to drive when I started driver's ed. I had had numerous lessons in cow pastures and along gravel and dirt roads for several years, from my great-uncle. But it didn't matter. I still had to take the written test, and all the class sessions, and the driving test.

We had a car I think I've described to you before. A 1979 Chevrolet Caprice Classic. Two doors. Light blue, with light blue interior—fabric seats and electric windows and door locks. Quite fancy for its time. 11 miles per gallon. Heavy. Enormous. Longer than a Suburban. Quite difficult to parallel park, which was a problem, because I had to parallel park it in order to pass the driving test. I practiced and practiced the day before. All I remember of the test is the parallel parking, though I'm sure I had to do something else, too. I parked it. I didn't hit the cones. But I was way too far away from the curb. I think the rules stated you had to be between 6-18 inches of the curb. I imagine the Caprice was more like four feet from the curb. I shifted into park and stared straight ahead. The examiner said, "Pull out from the parking place." I had the presence of mind not to stare at her as if she had lost her mind and did as I was told. I passed.

Me telling the DPS that I knew how to drive meant nothing. I had to show them. Similarly, telling the doctor you can see or hear just fine means nothing. You have to say what those letters are on the chart and raise your hand when you hear the beeps. Claiming that you can speak Spanish or English doesn't mean anything until you actually do so.

Some things have to be enacted in order to be true and meaningful. Not everything falls in this category, but one very important thing does: love. Love must be enacted to be fully expressed. Feeling love or even speaking love isn't as real or full or complete as enacting love, doing love.

This chapter from 1 Corinthians is probably pretty familiar to you. It's often read at weddings, people cross stitch parts of it onto pillows and quite possibly recite it to themselves as they're trying to refrain from speaking unkind words to

someone they love. Or maybe that's just me.

There's a lot to say about this chapter, but let's first remember where this is in the letter to the Corinthians. A couple weeks ago, we talked about Paul encouraging the Corinthians to use their spiritual gifts not for competition amongst themselves, but to use them for the common good. In the intervening verses, he continues that theme, making sure that the Corinthians understood that no gift was any more important than any other gift. He ends that chapter with "But strive for the greater gifts, and I will show you a still more excellent way."

Love is the still more excellent way, and we shouldn't take this chapter as if it's not related to the groundwork Paul laid in chapter 12. All those gifts mean nothing, without love. Love, too, should be used for the common good. Love isn't just felt but expressed in deeds as well as words.

Those most familiar verses, "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. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." All those adjectives are really action verbs.

Listen to those verses with verbs instead: Love waits patiently. Love acts kindly. Love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag or act snooty or indecently. Love doesn't do wrong but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I ran across something on the internet this week, that I thought fit in with this. It says, "People don't always say: I love you. Sometimes it sounds like: Be safe. Did you eat? Call me when you get home. I made you this. Watch for deer." Our words express love in those ways and so many more. Those words are deeds of love.

Love is words, actions, deeds. Love is intentional, ever changing and growing. Love doesn't stay the same. This love that Paul is describing is not just the love within a relationship or marriage, not just love within a family, but the love within a church community, and the love that the church community in turn expresses to the world. It's not just a feeling. Not just words. Love is deeds, too.

I think we here at First Presbyterian Church in Luling are ahead of the Corinthians on this. We love each other with feelings and words and deeds. Everyone's gifts are important and honored. And we exercise our gifts with love. We express our love for each other, and our love for God. We use words and hugs and listening ears and copy machines and sprinkler systems and candle lighters

and music and phone calls and donuts. And all of that is love, indeed.

Paul closes with some thoughts about the eternity of love. All the spiritual gifts that the Corinthians were squabbling about will come to an end, because they won't be needed in the age to come. We only know and think and speak with partial knowledge and thought and speech now. We only see dimly and fuzzy. When we are in the full presence of God, all of that will become clear in a more complete way. What will endure and remain the same, both now and in the kingdom, is love.

God's love is made real for us, now and future, in word and deed. God's love is made real for us in Jesus Christ, and that love abides, indeed.