

“One Anothering”

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Based on the book *We Make the Road by Walking* by Brian D. McLaren, Chapter
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Texts: Acts 10: 44-48 and 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

Here's an easy question to start the message today: How many of you have attended a wedding? Second question is harder, but I think you can handle it: Raise your hand (if you choose to) if you have heard the 1 Corinthians 13 passage at 10% of the weddings you have been to? Keep them up if you have heard this passage at 25% of the weddings you have attended? 50%? 75%? 100%? I have been to a few weddings myself. In fact, I have officiated at too many weddings to count. At a couple of times in my ministry, I'd have a wedding most every weekend, and a couple of times, two on a given Saturday. To say I've been to hundreds of weddings is an understatement. And yes, nearly 100% of the time I've used this scripture. When I didn't, it was usually because the couples "Didn't want to be like everyone else" so they wouldn't use it. For the rest, there is more than just tradition here, folks believe this to be the quintessential scripture on love. It's not the only one in the Bible, but it is, perhaps one of the most important, but I'm afraid misunderstood, scriptures in our Bible..

It's all about that great word we all know, and, in some way, we crave, *love*. Makes me want to start singing the "*Love Boat*" theme for those of you old enough to know what I'm talking about. I'll tell you right out the block that the Apostle Paul was hardly using the word love the way the "*Love Boat*" did.

Did you know that there are three words for love in the Greek language (the language of the New Testament)? They are *eros*, meaning romantic love; *Philos* meaning brotherly love; and *agape* having to do with concern for the well-being of another person. You can find much more about these words on a website called Sermon writer, or just google Greek words for love. Anyway, the Apostle Paul, in this famous scripture, only uses one word for love: *agape*. It is as much as doing word as a feeling word. It requires action and a demonstration of love in some practical manner. An agape person will DO something. Do you catch how we sometimes misread it in weddings? We get all sappy about the word *love* and forget that isn't some sappy moment surrounded by hearts, it is about action and mutual concern not just between newly married spouses, but between people who call themselves Christian and the world around them (us).

I don't normally do this in a sermon, but I want to look at many of the lines in this scripture and comment a bit. The first three verses I might call the

“showing off” verses, which, sadly, is what much of Christianity is about these days. Show ‘em you are a Christian! Can you speak in tongues? Can you give it all away? Are you faithful, then move a mountain, and no, I don’t mean a figurative one? Put on a good show and they’ll know you are Christian by your wondrous acts of faith. Here’s what Paul wrote:

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. ²And 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. ³If 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.

In other words, show off all you want to, my Christian friends, but if you don’t do it with concern for other people’s well-being, then it is useless. It’s more about pride and looking good and ego than anything to do with our Christianity. Does that mean doing those things is wrong? No! But it does mean that the reason we do what we do is not about us, or showing off, or inflating our own ego.

Honestly, it’s after these first three verses that I think it gets harder. I know you’ve heard this scripture many times but forgive me as I share it with you again, slowly, and it parts, so we all actually think about it instead of drifting off to la la love land.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I have no doubt that you agree with everything Paul says about *agape* love here.

Ever try to do it, with the well-being of another as your primary motive? Now that's hard. Be patient with that most difficult person you know. Be kind to the jerk down the street, concerned for his or her well-being. To be concerned for the well-being of another means that you aren't envious of them, boastful of your own self, arrogant, or rude. Now, I want to break here and remind you that *agape* love is not doormat love. Paul is not expecting, nor am I, that you or I would stay in an abusive relationship with anyone saying that this scripture tells you to because you are being patient. For if you follow the rest of this scripture, Paul reminds us that *agape* love rejoices in truth. And sometimes the truth is that the best thing you or I can do for another is to let them go. Yes, Paul tells us to endure all things in the next line, but I think it takes it out of context for someone to use this one line to stay in a harmful, hurtful, abusive (and yes, I mean physical, mental, or emotional) relationships.

And yet, in our culture, there seems to be so little patience, so little endurance, and we get irritated so easily with almost anyone. In the store, on the

street, in the church, in our neighborhood, in our school – you name it – and we’ve seen a lot of Christians this year preach love and practice something far different than “concern for the well-being of another.” I could preach on that all day and just use 2020 and 2021 as my backdrop, but let’s move forward.

Getting back to the scripture:

8 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. ⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When 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

This is another show-off section. Look at me, I can prophesy! I can speak in tongues! Look how smart I am! Now we might not say it directly that way, but we’ve all seen it (and I’m afraid, we’ve likely done it somewhere). But all those things are temporary. Being a child is temporary. It doesn’t mean we can’t love like children, play like children, or celebrate our “inner child” if you want to, but being childish, which is so the rage these days, is just not love.

“Faith, hope and love abide,” Paul tells us, “but the greatest of these is love”. And the kind of love he speaks of is love that is *agape*, concerned for the well-being of others. The greatest thing we can do is not to be people of faith, although that’s good. The greatest thing we can do is not to be people of hope,

although that's good, too. No, the greatest thing we can do is to demonstrate our love, our care and compassion toward others. I'm afraid that so many of us (maybe all of us from time to time?) are so concerned with our own self, and our own well-being, and our own security, that we leave little room for the care (or dare I say the love) for another! We are sending our young people into the world, but our love for them can hardly end here. If we really love them, we'll be concerned for their well-being well into the future, maybe forever!?!

McLaren says what I'm trying to say in this way, "Where the Spirit is moving, love for God always, always, always overflows in the love for neighbor. And according to Jesus, our neighbor isn't just the person who is like us, the person who likes us, or the person we like. Our neighbor is anyone and everyone – like us or different from us, friend or stranger – even enemy." Later in the chapter, he continues, "Faith communities at their best are Spirit-schools of love, engaging everyone, from little children to great-grandparents, in lifelong learning. In the school of Spirit, everyone majors in love. May we love one another as God has loved us.

In the spirit of agape love. Amen.