



HOMILY
CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE OF
MC ELLIS AND TRINA JONES
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
Saturday, August 31, 2024
The Rev. Dr. Marcia Whitney Mount Shoop, Pastor

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And 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. If 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. 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; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 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. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When 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. For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.

Love letters used to be part of the way people fell in love with each other. The carefully crafted sentences written by hand, lovingly placed in an envelope, sealed with a kiss, maybe even sprayed with perfume before it was stamped and placed in the mail. Days would pass before that letter would finally arrive and deliver the language of love written days before. It's almost hard to imagine how we used to savor things in a world before emails and text messages and Marco Polos and snap chats and FaceBook posts.

And yet just about all of us in this room did exist in that world—that world of waiting and savoring and missing our beloved and taking time with the ways we shared our innermost thoughts—taking care with the words that could describe what made someone special and cherished and desired. There's a sturdiness to that kind of communication—the kind that we can take our time with, the kind that we can savor and digest slowly, the kind that we trust

will last over time—and not evaporate in a matter of minutes like when a text exchange goes wrong or you get ghosted after pouring your heart out in a direct message.

There's something beautiful about the way we used to have no choice but to let love prove itself and fill in the open spaces that existed between conversations. Can you remember that world—the world without cell phones and without overnight shipping? It's hard to remember.

Now take your memory back into a time none of us was around to experience. We only know it through our ancestors and our epigenetics and through the ways we have inherited the artifacts that speak to us from the past—take yourself back to the ancient Mediterranean world when a man named Paul and many of wrote in his name were caught up in a movement, a cultural moment that changed everything for them.

Paul and those who wrote in Paul's name used love letters to fuel the emerging Jesus following movement that was just being born in the wake of Jesus' life and public execution. The movement was, no doubt, fueled by word of mouth and stories of miracles and holy moments.

But it was also fueled by love letters—written to communities, to collectives that were building something new together. Paul's letters are the earliest writing of the Jesus following movement that we have. In fact, his 1 Thessalonians is the earliest writing we have in the Christian New Testament. Many letters attributed to Paul were probably not written by him, but by those who wrote in his name and out of his reputation.

Paul wrote lots of letters to the church in Corinth, not just two. In fact, the letters we call 1st and 2nd Corinthians are probably fragments of several letters. And the 1st one is probably not the 1st one, and the 2nd one is probably more like the 5th or 6th.

Paul didn't write these words about love in this letter to the Corinthians for a wedding. In fact, way back then weddings didn't even have the pretense of being about love. They were about property and wealth concentration. Marriage was transactional.

So, Paul was not thinking about a day like today when he wrote these words to the Jesus followers of Corinth. He was thinking about everyday life—and he was concerned that that young church was already losing its way when it came to love.

Word on the street was that the Corinthian church was mirroring the privilege and hoarding and hierarchy of Empire instead of the generosity and equity and liberation of Jesus. Those with more resources were eating all the Communion elements before the

impoverished members of the community even arrived. I can imagine, it was those who did not have to work for a living got there and ate all the food before those who did have to work were able to arrive.

The Corinthians were creating hierarchies around who could sit where and with whom. They were forgetting or foregoing the table fellowship that Jesus had modeled.

The table was a place where Jesus crossed **social** boundaries and healed the wounds of oppressive systems, it was not a place where he entrenched the lies of domination and supremacy that Empire colonized the people to believe with conquest and occupation.

Paul's love letter to the church in Corinth is not a laundry list of how to be a good spouse, it's a recipe for a revolution in a culture colonized by the abuse of power and mentalities of scarcity and broken trust. Paul's love letter is about the restoration of right relationship.

All these centuries and generations later, we read these few lines of his revolutionary love letter when we gather together to celebrate two people promising to take care of each other for the rest of their lives.

On the surface, it could appear that by using this letter to instruct couples getting married, we have squeezed all the revolution and liberation out of the letter. It could appear on the surface that the church has once again appropriated and colonized something meant for liberation and revolution and used it to control or cajole us into conforming to the norms of patriarchy or capitalism or white supremacy or heteronormativity—any of the things that teach us to stay in our place.

But the surface isn't where we find the truth about God's love or about God's liberation—the surface has often been white washed. So we have to go deeper into the roots and the guts, into the history and the mystery, into the beautiful truth that calls to us into the spark of divinity that is in each of us.

Trina and MC, what is happening here today is a revolution. And it's not just about the two of you. It's about the way God is at work to free us all in a world where injustice and hate and pain and captivity can seem to have the upper hand.

Your decision to make promises to each other today in the name of God's love, in public, in a church, in front of God and all these witnesses, is a revolution—it is an act of resistance, a leap of faith, a bold witnessing to the truth of who God is and how the power of God's love is more creative and healing and liberating than any other so-called power in the world.

Trina and MC, God brought you together with divine purpose. You are a healing balm for each other and you are an inspiration to all of us.

You meet each other with tenderness and a desire to commit, and you mirror back to us what it looks like to choose healing and shared vulnerability instead of hiding and never letting anyone truly see us for fear of getting hurt.

The joy that you feel together, the ways you are open to growing and finding new ways of knowing each other and knowing God—it is no doubt a gift beyond measure in your life, but it is a gift to all of us, too.

You show us the way God's love does not conform to the distortions and contortions of oppressive systems, but God's love reveals itself in freedom and in fidelity and in finding ourselves truly seen by another person.

It has been a joy and a gift to witness the two of you explore life together—to remember where you've come from, to share the rawness of past pain, to find the courage to reveal what you need and never thought you would find.

These last several months we have gone way under the surface into your origin stories, into your perceptions and assumptions, into your habits and into your hearts. I have watched you all grow and meet each other in new ways—we have shared some holy moments together. There has been laughter and tears and beautiful revelations of shared values and of the ways you bring out the best in each other.

There is so much more living ahead for the two of you—and God's love is the golden thread that will continue to invite you to allow this marriage to be more than just about the two of you, but about the revolution that love is when it is true.

Your love will continue to strengthen our community, your extended families, your friendships, your workplaces, your connections with neighbors and strangers and with God.

Remember to slow down and savor what God has given you and how God is calling you—just like we have been able to do these last several months in our premarital counseling sessions. Just like Paul did in his love letters to the early Jesus followers finding their way in on an unknown path.

Remember to let the liberating power of love show itself in how you love each other when things get hard, when there is pain, where there is hurt, when it's easy to lapse into the ways we've been conditioned to shut down or run or hide when we've been hurt.

Love is not about always getting things right, it's about the depth of commitment to repair when there is hurt and harm.

That's not a commitment we see much in our world, in our country, in our community, and many times even in our families. Repair is hard work and it can be painful and uncomfortable and messy and it can take a while sometimes, too.

The avoidance and unwillingness to do the repair work the human family needs is at the root of the brokenness that divides us as people. But whenever any two people or any community or any collective or any family or any country or any planet chooses to use our energy to do the work of repair, that's when love finds its footing and deepens its root systems and flowers in the life we share.

And that's really what Paul's letter to the Corinthians was about—that love doesn't allow itself to get stuck in systems and structures that break relationship and trust—love wants and desires right relationship and love is willing to do the work of repair to get there.

If you remember anything about the love letter we read the day you two got married remember that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, [and] endures all things.” Remember that “love never ends.”

And remember that is the love God imprinted us with the capacity to give and to receive. May you never grow tired of savoring the love we celebrate today!

Thanks be to God.