

All About the Love

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

Reading the NT is a lot like reading someone else's mail. The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthian church because they had a problem. Evidently, they were all feeling *one up* or *one down* compared to others in the congregation. People were beginning to question their value to the church and that process was becoming destructive. Paul was trying to convey the message of how important it was to be Christ's body – arms, legs, and voice – in the city of Corinth. In fact, God would only be revealed to that larger community when *all* their spiritual gifts were valued and used.

Paul offered them and us a key for understanding and also for living. The greatest spiritual gift is love! Paul said it straight out – nothing matters as much as loving. Love – and he used the Greek word *Agapé* -- is more important than everything else put together. What is *Agapé*? Paul described its nature as the love God has for humanity, the love they saw in Jesus. This was not a different kind of love, but human love raised to a divine degree. It is how we love when divine shows through us.

Agapé describes not a kind of love that is different from the rest. Rather, it describes a way of loving in friendship, affection, or passion. This love is how we choose to relate to all the people in our lives when our choice is healthy and holistic.

We know the nature of this love. It is patient and kind. It never gives up. And it cares more for others than for self. We also know what it's not. Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't force itself on others, but maintains trust and holds space for another to question and grow. *Agapé* is a way of being in relationship that takes pleasure in the truth. It always looks for the best. It never looks back, but perseveres and keeps going to the end. God is present when this love is present at work, in school, in our families, in our churches, and in every relationship of our lives.

Agapé is how we're designed to love. It is the reliability of friendship when we stand next to someone and face life together with them. It is the comfort of affection and nurture when we hold someone close to us. It is the passion of seeing the beloved when we love face to face, looking into each others' eyes. *Agapé* is human love, in its many expressions, multiplied by the factor of God and growing in the depths of our souls. I appreciate the presence of *Agapé* in you and when it shows up in me.

I appreciate love's compassion: that love bears all things. It puts up with all my foibles. Love believes all things -- always trusts in God. Love hopes all things -- always looks for the best in people and situations. Love endures all things -- never looks back or second guesses.

Love is what it's all about in life. It is the sign of holiness within each person, the spiritual gift that reveals the divine presence as it grows, and hopefully shines, in our lives. Is there someone who loves you with gentle affection and deep fondness, who holds you when your world comes apart or sits with you when you're confused, someone who can be the presence of God to you?

Is there someone who stands beside you with gentle friendship? Is there someone who shares your interests, loves what you love, and helps you face the world with more resolve and more confidence -- who can be the presence of God with you?

Is there someone who waits for you, whose presence makes your heart race, takes your breath away, and occupies your every thought -- who can be the presence of God for you? When your enemy becomes fully human and your child or your parent becomes the face of God, there is *Agapé*, there is love.

To love is to act with the nature of God not because of who they are, but because of who you are --who God is through you. You have to grow up to love this way. Love is the mark of maturity in our lives, not growth in years of living or life experience, but the sign of practice and maturity of character.

We need to love this way because that's how we're created. It's how we're wired. So rejoice that God loves you. Rejoice that God loves through you when you take the chance and love someone else. Through the Spirit of God we can love anyone, and any one of us can be loved. One spiritual director described it: "God's action toward us is a masterpiece of partiality and love...."

(Abbe de Tourville from *Letters of Direction*, 1939)

It's all about LOVE so let us love! The grand mystery of all life delights in you and me. We are each a holy work of art – a work in process – both to be loved and to love. This is the only chance our world has of becoming more than we have been before -- when we love our enemies and our friends.

The presence of *Agapé* is the sure evidence that God is and that life is more than we ever imagined. But the potential of life, the possibility for realizing God's dream of peace, of oneness in this world, will never happen until people just like you and I take the chance, take the risk, and let our lives -- let our church – be defined by how well we love. Nothing else is more precious. No choice is more crucial. No other gift is more important. We have many ways we can live and many values we can espouse, but greater than any of them is love