

Learning to love
A Sermon by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday January 30, 2022

1 Corinthians 13

I want to begin this morning with a video that I think is helpful in understanding one of those scriptures that are pretty familiar to us.

1 Corinthians 13 – the passage on love is often heard at weddings, I use it at funerals, but Paul didn't write this magnificent literary piece for weddings or funerals.

It is not a passage that stands by itself.

There are 12 chapters that precede it and there are several chapters after.

This wonderful passage is written to a less than wonderful church.

The Corinthian Church has more problems than any of Paul's other churches.

So, here is an introduction and overview of the whole letter to the church.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/1-corinthians/>

The church in Corinth has got problems.

There are divisions in the church, different people following different teachers, and Paul reminds them that the Church, every church, is at its core a community of people gathered around Jesus.

Our first loyalty, our first love, our main purpose is all focused around Jesus.

Paul cares enough about the church, about this community of Jesus followers that he founded, to correct them, and help set them back on the right path. He urges them to get their primary focus back- which is on Jesus.

With regards to the sexual sin that was going on in the church, Paul makes it clear that yes we are free in Christ, and no longer under the law, but our

bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and what we do with our bodies matters.

Our bodies are joined with Jesus as part of the body of Christ, and so it matters who we are joined with sexually.

With food offered to idols, Paul points the community to do what is loving and what is best for the well-being of others.

Idol meat is nothing, idols are nothing, but injuring a brother or sister in the church, causing others to misunderstand the gospel, causing confusion in new believers; that is significant.

And then Paul starts to deal with problems in worship.

And Paul comes back to the underlying issue of the gospel, that we are to look out for the well-being of others, we are to build up the church.

Our spiritual gifts are not given to make us look good, or to be a source of pride, they are given by God to us to serve others.

And we are to put aside our own preferences, our own egos, even our own freedom, for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of Jesus who gave everything for us.

And in the midst of all these problems in the church, Paul breaks into these unforgettable verses about love.

There were several people in the church who were “right” in some sense – we are free in Christ and no longer under the law.

God gives us spiritual gifts and we should proudly use them.

But they missed the bigger picture – freedom is not to be used to destroy relationships.

Can you imagine what sleeping with your step-mother would do to all the family dynamics, and the betrayal of trust it is.

That is not love. That is not the way of Jesus.

Teachers of Jesus, and spiritual gifts given in worship to build up and bless the church became sources of division and a hierarchy of super Christians started to form in the body of Christ.

Whereas, true faithfulness, people learning to follow Jesus learn to put down their rights, to serve others, and take up their cross and follow him. That is what love is.

Paul is trying to help the church navigate a difficult time, teaching them to see every part of life through the lens of the gospel.

Paul is addressing two parts of the problem.

First, there is misunderstanding that Paul has to correct.

Holiness matters, what we do with our bodies matters.

Spiritual gifts are for the good of all the church, and everyone has a gift to share.

But in this passage Paul calls on God's people not only to know the right teaching, but to see how they live that teaching as being important.

As Paul corrects and speaks the truth to the church, he is called to do it in love.

Paul speaks with a view of building up, strengthening, helping, serving the church.

Paul patiently bears with the church, and calls them to bear with one another.

But love is not arrogant, boastful or rude.

Love is seen in the example of Jesus, the one who has gathered us and calls us as his people.

Thanks be to God.