

FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“LOVE, MORE THAN WORDS”

Scripture Lesson: 1 Corinthians 13

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling on Sunday, February 16, 2025
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

1 Corinthians 13

The Gift of Love

1 *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. 2 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. 3 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.*

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

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. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 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. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, 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. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

Love, More Than Words

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

I often refer to the Sunday closest to Valentine's Day as being part of Valentine's Day weekend on the off chance that someone who hasn't done anything before now might at least be partially redeemed. And I would add that sometimes it need not be spectacular. My wife, Martha Ann, has always told me that love begins by washing the dishes! Oh, I can talk about love all day long, but if at some point my love does not find expression. In my case, if love doesn't eventually get around to finishing our front porch painting project, I'm afraid I run the risk of being a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal!

There was a song written when I was a freshman in college entitled "More Than Words." It was written by a metal band called Extreme, but that particular song, if you remember it, was more of a ballad accompanied by a guitar, and it emphasized the importance of demonstrating love rather than just talking about it

"How easy, it would be to show me how you feel -- More than words is all you have to do to make it real -- Then you wouldn't have to say that you love me -- 'Cause I'd already know."

Love that finds expression – love in action – when you stop and think about it, well, that's what God's love is all about!

Consider how God's love is always happening! God creates the world, calls forth a people, leads them out of bondage, raises judges, speaks through prophets, and anoints kings, and then in

the fullness of time, the ultimate expression of God's love is revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord!

I attended a wedding over which Dr. Rogers presided, and he did a wonderful job of talking about the different kinds of love that are described in the Bible. In its various forms, the word itself appears almost 300 times!

Now, when we use the word love, based upon our tone and intonation, it may communicate one kind of love or another, but in the Bible, in ancient Greek, there are entirely different words for love.

Dr. Rogers did a good job of unpacking the words for love, such as philo or phih-LEH-oh, eros, and the word for love that most of us have heard before, agape -- and each of those words for love carries a different meaning.

Philo or phileo or phih-LEH-oh, for example, has to do with ordinary affection or a brotherly kind of love. And from that word, for example, emerges the name of the hometown of the NFL Championship football team, the Philadelphia Eagles, and not so coincidentally, Philadelphia is called "the city of brotherly love."

The word eros, on the other hand, means something different. Eros is used to describe the intense affection that one person has for another. Consider King Solomon! In the 6th chapter of the book that bears his name, he goes on and on about the woman he loves. Here's just one verse (and, guys, you may want to try this sometime):

"Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from washing, all of which bear twins, and not one of them is bereaved."

In its context, King Solomon's love was an eros kind of love -- it was erotic / it was sensual-- and love can be that way!

But love can also be all-encompassing -- the Bible refers to that kind of love as "agape" love...and, not surprisingly, agape is the kind of love that is most often associated with God.

Listen to what God says in Jeremiah 31 to his people, whom the world had seduced: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I've continued my faithfulness to you. Again, I will build you up, and you shall be built, oh, virgin Israel!"

Friends, when God uses that language, he is essentially saying that His love has the power to cleanse Israel from her unfaithfulness / to erase her infidelity as if it never even happened, "O, virgin Israel."

Such a remarkable transformation / such forgiveness, it is made possible by none other than God's love!

This morning's NT Lesson offers one of the best descriptions of love in the whole Bible. One could rightly say that the Apostle Paul has done a wonderful job of putting love into words, but Paul has done an equally good job of showing us that love cannot remain there-not in words, that is!

For Paul, love is something that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Looking back at our Old Testament Lesson this morning from the Book of Ruth, we are at the point in the story when Naomi had decided to go back home to her land and her people, and she is urging her daughters-in-law to remain where they were / in their land and with their people.

But Ruth loved Naomi! And Ruth's love, it was not just something she talked about; love was something Ruth did -- she went where Naomi went, she lodged where Naomi lodged, Naomi's people became Ruth's people, and Naomi's God became Ruth's God! (PAUSE)

Throughout the Book of Ruth, we see tangible expressions of love. A little later in the Book of Ruth, for example, we see love enacted by a man named Boaz, who was a relative of Ruth's deceased husband, and who fulfilled the ancient law of Israel's God by marrying her.

The translation for who and what Boaz was to Ruth is translated "kinsman redeemer," and in a beautiful way, Boaz foreshadows Jesus as our kinsman redeemer.

So, Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi clearly had a role to play, but ultimately, only God would take a story as broken as Ruth's and make of it something whole. Only God's love made their story of redemption possible. (PAUSE)

In 1 John 4:7-11, it says, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another."

This is one of the things I love about our church family. I'm so grateful that love actually happens in this place. We heard this morning about a new ministry called Cancer Companions!

It's a way by which we can come alongside those people who have gone through cancer, or who are struggling with cancer, or who may have a loved one who has or is grappling with the disease -- and we can support and encourage them and learn from each other, we can love each other!

Martha Ann once told me a story about her dad, which I have shared with some of you before she noticed that whenever they found themselves on a road trip and caravanning on a two-lane highway -- and when they would inevitably come upon a slower driver in the right lane -- her father, who was typically the lead car, he would wait until the line became a dotted line. Then he would safely pass using the left lane.

Now, what Martha Ann remembers is that her father would always wait to get back into the right lane until Martha Ann had successfully made the pass and returned to the right lane herself. It was as if her dad was guarding her / protecting her.

When I think of that example of love, it reminds me of the kind of love that we should have for one another -- a love that not only looks out for the welfare of our neighbor but goes so far as to put their needs before our own.

That's the reason we are here today! God loved us so much that he spared not his own Son for our sake! Knowing the consequences of our sin, he took our sins upon himself and, in doing so, he gave us the opportunity to joyfully respond to that love with a love of our own!

Jesus put it this way, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love, dear friends, that is the nature of God -- the Scriptures remind us that "Those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them!"

Love, in Jesus Christ our Lord, was never a stagnant thing -- his love happened! He didn't just pray for his enemies and those who persecuted him; he forgave them -- "Father," he said, "forgive them, for they know not what they do." And those words came from the cross / Jesus wasn't just talking about forgiveness; he was enacting forgiveness.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost and, like lost sheep, he found them. I appreciated all of what the students had to say who participated in last week's Youth Sunday, and as I was working on this morning's sermon, I remembered one thing Hugh Buxton pointed out in his.

Hugh talked about how interesting it was that we are compared to sheep. We don't like to think of ourselves as sheep! If you have seen them walk, they are really awkward. I recall a time when, in Scotland, a herd of sheep walked into the road without any sense of the danger that it posed to them, and traffic just stopped.

A sheep / that animal / that metaphor, it exemplifies our complete and utter dependence upon the love of God, our Good Shepherd, because, without God's intervention, we can't help but to nibble ourselves lost, that's just our nature as sheep!

But there is something else we have that sheep don't have a capacity to do better! By God's grace, we become salt and light and love!

And this is possible because the love of God was not something that was simply read about in some first-century synagogue! God's love was not something that Jesus just talked about! Love was so much more than words!

The love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, it lived and died and rose again, and that love is continually revealed to us by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit.

God's Spirit in our life, it calls and equips and sustains -- it makes possible an ever-unfolding drama of redeeming love, and we are part of the cast!

And we play our part best -- not by reading the script, but by bearing witness to it! In all the real and tangible ways that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and in all the real and tangible ways that we love our neighbors as ourselves!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! Amen.