



Sermon: “LOVE – A Path of Christian Life”  
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a  
Location: First Presbyterian Church of Lake Mary

Pastor: Hugh Lackey  
Occasion: Worship  
Date: January 31, 2010

We continue our look into Paul’s communications with the church of Corinth. Today’s lesson is a familiar one, but I suggest that most of us probably do not understand the context in which it was written. Today I will try to give us insight into Paul’s meaning and apply it to the experiences that Joe and I had last week while working in Haiti.

First, let’s hear what Paul had to say about love:

*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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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.*

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

*<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. <sup>1</sup>*

You need to remember our previous passages. This early church was caught up in conflict over the value (importance) of spiritual gifts. Paul’s words about love, while beautifully written describing the quality of love and its virtues, had a more practical application.

In the words of one biblical authority, commenting on this passage, “These words of exhortation were sent to a quarrelsome people who needed to know that their fervent religiosity wasn’t worth a tinker’s damn apart from a new relationship to one another, apart from love.”

The chapter is neatly divided into three parts, which we will look at briefly, and I will try to relate to the events and opportunities in Haiti.

First, **love is essential**. Paul leaves no question in the minds of his readers that “love” is essential to all actions; otherwise:

- *Speak(ing) in the tongues is like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*
- *Having prophetic powers, and understanding all mysteries and all knowledge, and if having all faith, so as to remove mountains, is nothing.*

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. 1 Co 13:1-13

- *Giving away all possessions, and handing over one’s body so that one may boast - gains nothing.*

Paul makes these statements in the first person, underscoring the personal direction of the argument. It is love that makes one’s actions meaningful. The antidote to loveless spirituality, according to Paul, was the practice of *a still more excellent way*.<sup>2</sup> That “way” was characterized by love, love that was modeled for them and us by Jesus.

On Wednesday, I went with Joe to see his Uncle Theo. As I was introduced to this pastor and leader of hundreds of churches, in Haiti and elsewhere, he commented, “Your trip this week is an act of faith.” My response to him was, “No, my trip is an act of love.” I did not have to be in Haiti last week. A friend told me that I would do more good by sending them the value of my ticket and staying home. It would have been safer. I disagreed and went first to help and second to show them that I cared and that I brought the love of many others with me.

Safety in Haiti was never a concern for me, but it was for others. I walked towards the car at the Santo Domingo airport to meet Joe, who had driven the 7-9 hours to get me. I suddenly saw many people around the car. He had carried seven people, needing a ride to the airport, with him. A lovely lady called to me, “He’s an angel, but he drives like a bat out of hell.” I responded, “You must have gotten a ride from Joe.” Other than our drive to / from Santo Domingo, safety on the trip was never an issue. Incidentally, the only time we had a problem was when I was driving and we had a minor accident!

We arrived Tuesday night in the middle of a three-hour worship service. As normal, when a visiting pastor is in church, he will be asked to speak and this was the case on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. On one occasion I explained the theme of this morning’s sermon. I applied it to my feelings for the people of Haiti in that worship service and in that devastated country. I explained that I represented the love of many American friends that cared for them and were praying for them. Love is the essential ingredient in anything we do. Without love, it is nothing.

Second, ***love must be practical***. Paul gives two positive statements about love: *Love is patient; love is kind*. Then he follows with eight negative statements and ends with four parallel affirmations, providing a composite picture of love in action, saying, *it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*.

His structure of this passage makes love the subject of each verb. Love does some things and resists other things. It expresses itself in down-to-earth contexts, where it refutes retaliation, demonstrates patience, and remains hopeful. He paints the picture that love primarily functions in situations of stress and / or conflict.

That certainly applies to Haiti today.

- Imagine for a moment that in 30 seconds your life was changed forever.
  - This was the situation for 2 million people on January 12.
- Imagine you are sitting in a room when the concrete roof begins to fall on you; you see a small hole and run for it. You make it, but the others do not.
  - That was Joe’s niece Martine; it was Daniel, the seminary student that we sponsor through Hope N Literacy.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. 1 Co 12:31

- Imagine seeing your parent walking down the street after the earthquake and then disappearing – never to be seen again.
  - That was the case of the wife of a pastor friend who had to leave and take her children to the USA not knowing.
- Imagine coming home, after surviving the quake, and seeing your home in a pile of rubble.
  - That is the situation for more than a million people today.
- Imagine living in a situation where your worldly possessions are limited to what you could salvage (if any); you have no money and no access to money, no place to sleep, no water to drink, no food to eat.
  - That’s the life for hundreds of thousands of men, women and children today.

The one thing that the Haitian people have not lost and was evident during my visit was *love and hope*. The best description of this nation and its people is **resilient**. They have endured so much in this poor country and they reveal the determination to bounce back, as best they can, without questioning God’s love.

I met a little girl named Monica, on Wednesday. As I noted, we had a small accident and the left rearview mirror was broken. We drove downtown to Port au Prince, and amidst the devastation, drove to what appeared to be a street full of junk cars. There we found a man to fix the mirror. While waiting, we saw a woman and a child sitting on a concrete block – doing nothing. We begin to talk and found out that they were the wife and daughter of the man fixing the car.

We asked how they made out. The woman pointed to a pile of rubble down the street and said it was their home. Then she pointed to a mattress, in a parking space of the car lot next to us, and said that was what they had left. There was no anger or resentment. They were alive and dad had work. They would recover. When we left, we paid dad for his work and gave Monica some money. Actually the gift to Monica – a gift of love, which mom immediately put away -- was more than dad charged for his services. It would buy food and give them a few more days of hope.

If love is revealed in times of stress, then you can be certain love is present in Haiti today. It is seen in the hundreds of people flying there to help, not so they can boast, but so they can do a little good in a country where every effort makes a difference. Love and hope are seen in the people of Haiti, who, in spite of their situation, know that they worship a God of Love.

Joe and I slept outside the church building on our air mattresses. On Thursday morning, I woke up to choral singing. The people, sleeping in the church, began praising God through beautiful Haitian chants / hymns. They followed their 30 minutes of singing with the Lord’s Prayer, and that was followed by individuals reciting Psalms. I wish I could have recorded it so you could experience their expression of love, faith, and hope, in a God who promised, *I will never leave you or forsake you.*

Last, Paul affirms the *permanence of love*. The images Paul used were forceful, between a child and an adult; between distorted reflection and clear vision through a polished mirror and face-to-face meetings.

The images of last week are indelibly marked in this pastor’s mind. The devastation that has occurred in Haiti is beyond description. I will schedule a time for us to look at a pictorial description of our trip, but it will not begin to show you the magnitude of this tragedy.

This is not a Katrina or a tsunami; it is the destruction of a nation and it will take the world to demonstrate the permanence of love. It will not be fixed in a week or a month, or a year. It demands the permanence of our love.

Paul reminded his readers of God’s gracious claim on them. The laws of nature bring devastation to the world, at times, and I expect that the devastation from this Haitian earthquake will go down in history as one of the worst. I also believe, because scripture tells me, *that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*<sup>3</sup>

I received an email, while I was gone, from a friend in New Jersey. Nancy has just published a book entitled, *Dancing Like There Is No Tomorrow*. It is a memoir of her daughter, Sara, who died from leukemia at age nineteen, after an eight-year battle. Each chapter of the book begins with a poem written by Sara.

Nancy said that much of the sermon I preached, preceding my trip, talked about themes that are evident throughout the book: Themes such as God’s divine ability to make good out of bad situations, to allow us to realize opportunities in the midst of suffering and sorrow, to see the reality that God is always with us and that we never have to go through difficult times alone. He will be there.

I believe, I know Nancy believes, many of you believe, and certainly many Haitian Christians believe that God will allow good to come from this tragedy. That will be revealed in the lives of many families, many displaced children who find new homes, and others who might realize a better life one day.

It will be evident in your and my actions in support. It will be evident in the actions of governments around the world, and it will be evident in the actions of NGOs like Hope N Literacy, which is now working to open a school in Petion-Ville for children who have no school and is also seeking God’s direction about opening an orphanage in Casse-Pied. The future of Haiti, I believe, will reveal that *faith, hope, and love abide...but the greatest of these is love.*

Love is, indeed, the path to Christian life. Sara Hussey knew that and said so in a poem that she wrote while in the hospital. It applied to her short life and it applies to all of us, too.

She wrote:

*Love is warm and love is bright,  
love a deep and sharing light.*

*Love is everywhere near and far,  
love is the night sky with one shining star.*

*Love is shared in many ways,  
to fill our hearts, throughout our days.*

*Love is everlasting, never overcome.  
It shines throughout the centuries,  
Touching us, each and every one*

By God’s grace, may it be so.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Ro 8:28