

# 1 Corinthians 13, is often referred to as the 'Love Chapter' 2-Feb-25

I rather feel that the readings over the last few weeks have been leading us up to this crescendo from Paul's New Testament words for today. So much of what we heard a few moments ago relates directly to where we find ourselves this morning particularly concerning the daily news. This particular passage is one of the most commonly used passages at weddings. The words are absolutely beautiful, the sentiment which we have attached to them make us feel warm and fuzzy inside – and we remember them with an acute sense of warmth and promises made to each other as the happy couple face their future together.

1 Corinthians 13, is often referred to as the 'Love Chapter', because of its ambitiousness coupled with the expectation that an exploration of love is happening in open honesty inclusive of the differing opinions which may be shared over the lifetime of the relationship.

When Paul was writing to the church in Corinth he was writing to a community grappling with divisions, spiritual pride, and moral issues – all of which resonate with many of today's challenges which can be the cause of so much hurt and pain. Sometimes unintentional, sometimes on purpose. I wonder if Paul's audience felt confronted by what they were hearing? I gather the kind of love Paul was talking about was the opposite to their behaviour.

If Paul was writing to us today the thought of love as described in 1 Corinthians remains crucial as we work our way through an increasingly interconnected and yet fragmented community. Paul gives us the foundational understanding that love goes beyond what we can see, hear and sometimes experience. He places significant importance on a community filled with love, even the most impressive spiritual gifts – such as speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy, even a great capacity to hold onto one's faith are useless if there is no or little capacity for love. Paul can't stress enough a truth which can't be denied: the authentic honesty in our relationships and interactions with others is very important. Being in a relationship that is based on an authentic honesty requires an understanding of love for the relationship to survive the up's and down's that occur between two or more people.

We can't deny our imperfections, and occasional conflict of opinions and actions through social media, political conversations, and community disagreements happen and this is when and where our call from Christ to love becomes even more critical. This is when we need to be aware of what is being said, is said in a culture which often promotes competitiveness where winning an argument or proving a point takes precedence over building understanding, connection and a positive loving relationship with others. Paul's vision of love as patient, caring, not envious or boastful, offers a very different kind of relationship to the perverse combative relationship I mentioned a moment ago.

We live in an era that often encourages expressions of outrage, division, and dissatisfaction, so embracing a patient, type of approach may seem to be asking for something which could be revolutionary and daunting. When I think about the changes that Mahatma Ghandi made to India in the early to mid-last century I know patience, caring and love for each other changes outcomes. One of Mahatma Ghandi's more well-known quotes is 'In a gentle way, you can shake the world.'

Love isn't just a feeling; it's also a choice we make. A choice to care for someone or others before ourselves. We take it upon ourselves to do this – sometimes the choice is easier to make than others. This also reminds us of the familiar words; empathy and compassion, which are needed especially in times of conflict and differences of opinions. At the moment we are looking in the eye communities which are struggling with racial and religious injustice, economic inequality and global crises, the challenge to be the loving people of God is becoming increasingly difficult as we feel we're being pulled in so many directions.

However, the love, patience and caring which our faith requires of us is accompanied by the words of Micah 6:8 *'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'*

Paul's words remind us that as we walk humbly with God, we have the capacity to be resilient, in our developing relationships despite some of the adversities that we face. Love inspires us to remain committed, through thick and thin times. This is particularly relevant in today's world, where relationships can be tested by manipulative strong external influences.

This brings me to technology; while providing resources for connection, it can also exacerbate divisions, allowing space for misunderstandings and negativity. Paul's assertion that love rejoices with the truth becomes so important at this point. In the age of misinformation, disinformation and rapid communication, discerning and advocating for truth, doing this through a lens of love, can't be overstated. Navigating conflicts in a digital age often demands self-reflection with a measure of self-awareness and understanding of the impact our words may have over our intention.

Paul portrays love as enduring speaks to the need for patience and commitment over shallow and meaningless sentiments. Another Ghandi quote: 'the day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace' patiently we wait knowing we still have a long way to go. In a consumer driven culture often marked by instant gratification, relationships can be seen as dispensable. Sometimes even named as seasonal – meaning it was a relationship that lasted as long as the purpose they were needed for was fulfilled. That's a painful realization for anyone, group or community. However, despite knowing this Christ invites us to continue to invest ourselves deeply in relationships at all levels, echoing the sentiment that enduring love is like a sweet nectar to a genuinely loving community.

Every day I'm in awe with just how relevant the scriptures written so long ago in today's context. We began with Jeremiah's words that God knew us before we were even born. God

loved us first, before anyone else had a chance to love us. Constantly we are challenged by individuals and communities to continue to nurture and grow a love that is protective, proactive, resilient and founded on truth. One last quote from Ghandi is 'A person is but the product of their thoughts; what they think, they become'. Our aim is through Christ's love to create an environment where conflict doesn't lead to division or walk-outs, but rather become a place for growth and deeper understanding what love is within our community and ourselves.

Our God is an awesome God, Philippians 4:13 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'

One of those 'all things' is to patiently love, and to love patiently standing on the firm foundation with God as our rock. Amen