

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, February 2, 2025
"Beyond Emotion"

Young at Heart Message

Did you all know that we have in our midst the best guitar player in all of Calgary today, and he owns the very best guitar in the city?

Do you want to hear him play a song?

John, come on up and play a song for us and show off that amazing guitar you have.

John plays us a song.

What did you all think? Pretty awesome, right?

Wait, it wasn't awesome?

Why do you think it didn't sound that great? He's the best guitar player in the city, and he's playing the best guitar!

The problem with his guitar is that, for the strings to work, they have to be held tightly by two points. In other words, the strings need to be holding tension.

These guitar strings aren't holding any tension. As you can see, the strings are very loose.

So, when John tried to strum the strings, they didn't sound right because they weren't holding any tension.

So, even if John was the best guitar player in the whole world, not just in Calgary, and he was playing the very best guitar in the world, without any tension on the strings, he cannot make a beautiful sound.

The Message

Thank you John for helping us demonstrate Paul's point in our scripture passage today.

We heard one of the most common scriptures read from the Bible about love. 1 Corinthians 13 is often read at weddings as a reminder to the couple of what it means to love one another, even as things get difficult in their marriage.

Paul reminds us that love is not always easy.

The kind of love he talks about goes far beyond the emotional love that we think of, particularly when we think about the kind of love that couples experience.

Paul is talking about something far deeper. He's talking about the love we experience between ourselves and God, between one another, and the love we hold for ourselves.

But, he throws us a word of caution, too.

He starts out by telling us that no matter how amazing we think we are, no matter how much better we think we are than others, no matter how "right" we are, without love, we have nothing.

Paul says, "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I have nothing."

This is an incredibly humbling statement he's making.

Often, we believe that if we are just good people – if we give what we can, if we volunteer our time, if we extend kindness to others – we are good to go.

But Paul says that even if we do all of that, but don't hold space for love, we have nothing.

Now, our actions often say more about us than our words do, so doing these things might be a demonstration of love.

But if, instead, we do these things to make ourselves feel good rather than doing it for others, or if we do them for other selfish reasons rather than as a demonstration of love, we ultimately have nothing.

I'll try to offer an example from an experience I once had.

When I first returned to the church, I was attending a non-denominational church. After a few months of attending, I learned that the pastor was an interim, and they were beginning their search for a new pastor.

In that process, they invited three potential candidates to come preach to the congregation. The first two came to preach two weeks in a row, one after the other.

But the third candidate wasn't able to accommodate their schedule for over a month.

When he finally came to preach, he swept into that church and gave a charismatic sermon in which he spent most of the time boasting about how amazing he was and the wonderful things he did (on behalf of God, of course).

He had a way of invoking people's emotions – people were crying and carrying on in ways I had never seen happen in that church.

No one knew this man, and yet he was able to play on their emotions and, in my opinion, manipulate them quite easily to rouse an emotional response that had nothing to do with God.

I wanted to run from that place. But I forced myself to stay, and at the end of the sermon, this preacher said something I will never forget.

He said “my wife and I are quite prophetic, so if you have been wanting answers from God about something, I invite you to come forward after the service and we can lay our hands on you and God will speak to you through us.”

Now, maybe this man and his wife *did* have the gift of prophecy that Paul mentions in his letter to the Corinthians. Maybe they could “fathom all mysteries and all knowledge.” Maybe they did “have a faith that can move mountains.”

But there was no love there. There was no trust.

People put their faith in that man that day. God was nowhere to be found. It was entirely about him.

That's why Paul starts this passage with a word of caution.

He goes on to say what we most often remember from this passage: Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not self-seeking, or easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Paul is talking, just like in last week's scripture, about wholeness and completeness. You can be the most amazing person on earth, but without

humility, without this love that is patient, kind, not envious or boastful or rude, you have nothing.

Essentially, you cannot *think* you are the most amazing person in the world and also *be* the most amazing person in the world.

Truly amazing people love others in the way Paul describes, and they love themselves in the way that Paul describes, but most of all, they love God in the way Paul describes.

Loving God ultimately means demonstrating that love toward others, but not for selfish gain.

And, while Paul doesn't say this, I would add that love is risky. We put our hearts on the line when we extend our love to others. We also put our hearts on the line when we commit to loving God.

Why?

Well, anyone in this room who has ever prayed for something incredibly important to them and has not had that prayer answered likely has questioned God. Perhaps your heart broke a little bit, or a lot, when that prayer wasn't answered.

Perhaps your trust in God waned. Perhaps anger and hurt bubbled over and out and engulfed you like flames, pulling you further from God.

Loving God is risky. Opening your heart to other people is risky. There is always a chance you'll be hurt.

And yet, it is often, or perhaps always, worth the risk.

As I was writing this sermon, I originally made that statement – that loving people is often, or perhaps always worth the risk – and I moved on to my next point.

But as I thought more about this, I realized that I need to say something about *why* loving is worth the risk.

I will admit that opening my heart in this way – to this deep, abiding love – has led to hurt in my past.

I think that's true for many people. We love deeply, and then we lose someone. Or we love deeply and then that person leaves us. Or perhaps even worse, that person hurts us in small ways over months or years.

Sometimes, people hurt us so deeply that it can take a very long time to recover. So, what do we do?

We put up walls around our hearts which keep us from allowing us to love others deeply.

These walls keep us safe, but they also might keep us from taking the risk of loving others as deeply again in the future.

But opening ourselves to that risk is worth it because this kind of love goes far beyond the superficial love we see in romance movies or novels.

The kind of love Paul is talking about is a love that changes us and the world around us.

This kind of love creates a deepness and a richness to life that helps us create purpose and meaning.

It allows us to be fully present with people – to hear them, to see them, and to appreciate even the things about them that might not jive with our own personalities or preferences.

Even if we end up loving this deeply only to be hurt down the road, it is the kind of love that we would do over and over again, accepting the potential for hurt as part of the value of loving in such a rich and meaningful way.

We cannot become wholly ourselves until we have learned to love in this deep, abiding way that Paul speaks of.

Much like the best guitar in the world cannot play the most beautiful music without tension in the strings, we cannot be our full, complete selves without this kind of love.

We must accept the risk of hurt in order to move fully into our True Self.

We must build trust with ourselves, with others, and with God.

That man that came to preach at the church I went to long ago was missing the most important part of his message, which is what *wasn't* said. He had not built trust with the congregation. He had not demonstrated kindness or patience.

Instead, he was boastful and proud and self-seeking. He felt good about himself by placing himself above the rest of us, and above God.

May we learn from my experience, and may we open our hearts to the possibility of this deep, abiding love that Paul speaks of.

May we accept the risk of allowing ourselves to be patient and kind, to trust, protect, hope, and persevere.

May we rest in God's loving embrace, extending that same love to those we meet, softening our hearts and breaking down walls we've created so that we can become whole.

May we remember that love is patient and kind.

May we know fully, even as we are fully known, and may we remember that no matter what, these three things remain: faith, hope, and love.

But the greatest of these is love. Amen.

Our prayer today is more of a reflection on love than a prayer, but I thought it worth sharing. This is a slightly modified version of a reflection called "Love Is," by Roddy Hamilton.

Love is... hugs

Love is... a kind word or gesture

Love is... when two become one

Love is... friendship

Love is... sharing laughter, joy, and pain

Love is... hard to explain

Love is... unbelievable

Love is... unpredictable

Love is... endless

Love is... protection

Love is... a rollercoaster we'd ride over and over

Love is... a smile

Love is... a heartbeat

Love is... patient

Love is... kind

Love is... a never ending story

Love is... eternal

Love is... a circle of friends

Love is... steadfast

Love is... wholeness and completeness

Love is God, and God is love. Amen.