

I Corinthians 13:1-13

Second Baptist, Lincoln
 Second Sunday of Lent
 February 28, 2010
 Dr. Stephen Wisthoff

The Way of Love (Slide 1)

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

² 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 have not love, I am nothing.

³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Imagine yourself driving down a street near your house, a little late for work. You turn onto a busy main thoroughfare, press down on the accelerator, and suddenly spot a police car parked on the side street. What do you do? You lift your foot off the accelerator, of course. Doesn't everyone? How often our behavior is dictated by whose watching! Our theme this week is ***When churches see the unseen Christ, they lavish his love on others.*** This reminds us that although Christ might not be bodily seated here in our sanctuary this morning, he is our unseen audience in every situation – here in worship, or driving to work.

If we truly recognize his presence on a day-to-day basis, how would we treat people differently? Unlike the policeman, Jesus' presence doesn't intimidate us into keeping a set a rules, rather, his life and presence call us to follow his way-

- the way of love. He sets the model. In other words, he has lavished his love on us, it is our pleasure to lavish his love on others.

This morning, we are looking at a familiar passage of scripture that we most often hear read at weddings. This passage describes in detail the manner of real love. It's the love that Jesus lives and inspires us as believers to exhibit toward others.

I. **Jesus' love is the grand essential in the drama of our lives.** (vs. 1-3) Look with me at First Corinthians 13. Love is doing the right thing for the right reason. Our text says, ¹ **If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.** If I'm doing all the right things, but I do not do it in love and do not exhibit love, then it is worthless, nothing. It has no value and it leads us down the path of spiritual bankruptcy. Do I *preach*? Then it is to be done with love. It is not to be harsh but loving. Do I pray *prayers of faith*? They are to be prayers that will result in others sensing God's love. Do I give generously? These gifts are to be given out of a loving and a caring heart. Paul says even if you give up your body to the flames as a martyr, but don't have love toward others, nothing is of value.

Have you ever known someone who is full of religion but lacks love? I'm reading a book right now titled The Texas Baptist Crucible. It is written as an expose of a fundamentalist Baptist college in Texas. The gist of the book is: At this college in Texas, EVERYTHING was done in the name of pious, strict religion, but NOTHING was done in love. Sometimes churches can be that way. Sometimes people can be that way. Religion without love is worthless and meaningless. It turns to self-righteousness and legalism. It is condemning and overbearing. That is not what Jesus' love is all about.

II. **Jesus' love is often thought Extravagant in its expression.** (v. 4-8) I love verses 4-8 in I Corinthians. Why don't you read them with me. ⁴ **Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.** ⁵ **It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.** ⁶ **Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.** ⁷ **It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.** ⁸ **Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.**

These verses call us to a lavish love and that is unheard of in this world. Eugene Peterson's translation called The Message reads this way, **"It's love that never gives up, cares more for others than for self. Doesn't want what it doesn't have, doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others."**

In my limited training in marriage counseling, we are told that couples are not to use words like NEVER and ALWAYS. “You never carry out the garbage. You always have to be right.” Those are extreme words. Paul uses those words regularly through chapter 13. Why? Because love is extravagant and extreme. Real love has to work in the extremes. You can’t “kind of” love someone else. A marriage that is based on a *Kind-a love* is doomed. So is a friendship. Why? Because that kind of love has too many conditions attached.

Jesus love is extreme, extravagant and unconditional. Tony Campolo tells a wonderful story of traveling to Honolulu for a speaking engagement. With the time difference, the jet lag found him wide awake at 3:00 a.m. He wandered around and found a sleazy little greasy spoon diner near Waikiki that was still open. He ordered coffee and a donut.

After a few minutes, the place filled with eight or ten prostitutes. They were noisy, provocatively dressed and talking crudely. He overheard the conversation between two of the women: “Tomorrow’s my birthday, I’m gonna be 39!” The response from the other woman was less than enthusiastic. “So what do you want from me, a party? You want me to get you a cake and sing happy birthday?”, the woman said sarcastically. The birthday girl replied, “Nah, but why do you have to be so mean? I don’t expect a party...I’ve never had one my whole life, why would I expect one now.”

When Tony heard the conversation, he made a decision. When the woman left, he asked the owner if the one having a birthday came in every night. “Yes, that’s Agnes, she comes in every night. Why do ya want to know?” “I heard her say tomorrow is her birthday...What do you say we give her a party?”, Campolo suggested. The owner liked the idea and offered to bake her a cake. Tony got the decorations and showed up the next night at 3:00 a.m. They hung a sign that said, “Happy birthday, Agnes!” and hung crepe paper everywhere. The word was out. By 3:15, the place was filled with prostitutes and Tony Campolo – A Baptist sociologist from Eastern College.

At 3:30, the door swung open and in walked Agnes and her friends. Everyone yelled, “Happy Birthday, Agnes!” He said he had never seen anyone more flabbergasted. She actually got so shaky Tony thought she would faint. By the end of an off-key rendition of “Happy birthday.”, Agnes’ eyes were filled with tears. When the birthday cake with lit candles was brought out, she openly cried. She couldn’t even blow out the candles so the owner blew them out for her.

The owner said, “Cut the cake”. She responded as she looked down at the cake, “If it’s ok, can I keep the cake for a little while. I don’t want to cut into yet.” She wanted to take it home. The owner said, “Sure, its ok if you keep it.”

Agnes left with the cake and walked down the street to her apartment. She carried that cake like a ring on a pillow.

When the door of the diner closed, there was silence. Tony said he wasn’t sure what to do, but in the spur of the moment, he said, “What do you say we pray!” He prayed for Agnes, for her salvation, for her life to be changed, and for God’s goodness to touch her life. He said it felt strange for a Christian sociologist to be leading a prayer meeting with a bunch of prostitutes in a diner in Honolulu at 3:30 in the morning. When he finished, the owner leaned over the counter and said with a bit of anger... “Hey, you never told me you are a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?” Tony said that it was one of those moments when just the right words came to him. “I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning.” The owner replied, “No you don’t, there’s no church like that. If there were, I’d join it. I’d join a church like that.”

Now tell me you don’t understand this term *extravagant love*. Tell me you don’t know what it means to *LAVISH* love on others. Christ has equipped us with the heart of Christ and we have the wherewithal to lavish this kind of love on others. What would Jesus have done had he been in that diner in Honolulu? We read in the gospels that he sat and dined with tax collectors and sinners. Some believe that some of his followers were prostitutes. He would have thrown that party.

Our ACTION STEP last week was, *Prepare your heart for meaningful worship*. That means that worship begins at home. It begins in your daily walk with God. And it culminates in the worship event here on a Sunday morning. Meaningful worship takes preparation of the heart.

Today’s Action step is *Show Christ’s love through secret acts*. On the bulletin insert, you will find seven slots, one for each week of the adventure. I could have suggested some things for you to do, but each of you are unique and each of you will touch the lives of others in unique ways. There are people all around you who are in need of a touch of kindness.

III. Jesus’ love, eternal in its scope, is the only thing that really matters. Vs. 8-13 in I Corinthians 13, we find these words in verse 8: **But where there are**

prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

All the status, good works and fame that you see around you is meaningless and worthless without love. Jesus' love and the love he has taught us to exhibit is ALL that really matters in this world. It is the only thing that lasts while everything else rusts and falls apart.

Three things are important: ¹³ **And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.** We are challenged by this passage to let Jesus' love be the motivating factor to all our actions. Have you ever asked yourself this question? "What will Jesus ask me when I see him face to face?" I think we can conclude from this text he will ask us one thing. Did you love? AMEN.