



**Sermons from St. Marks  
United Church of Christ  
New Albany, Indiana**



**We Want the Love Scripture**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

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When a couple who is getting married meet with me before the wedding and we are discussing the wedding service itself, there are two comments that come up repeatedly.

First, someone, usually the woman, says, I don't want anything in the vows about obeying and secondly, they tell me that they want the love Scripture and of course they are referring to 1 Corinthians 13 - our Scripture for today.

The Scripture is used at almost every wedding, but why wouldn't it be?

It is a beautiful passage.

It is part of Paul's letter to the people in the church in Corinth.

Paul didn't write it for people who were getting married or were already married - but that doesn't mean that it isn't a great text for weddings, just that Paul's words about love were for all of the people in the church at Corinth and the understanding of love that he talked about can be applied to all of us in all of our relationships.

It's kind of funny if you think about the fact that Paul didn't really like the idea of marriage period.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

Can you imagine a couple coming to me to get married and my saying, well if you have to, I mean if you can't control yourselves then yea, go ahead, get married - I guess you better. Not much of an endorsement for marriage.

Over the years when I would read the love Scripture I would feel guilty. Todd and I had it read at our wedding too and so when I would read it over the years I'd start out - Love is patient. Love is kind. Yep that's right - I do that. Love is not jealous or boastful - yep, no problem there. It is not arrogant or rude - well sometimes I can get a little arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way - uh oh,

it is not irritable or resentful - I'm in trouble -

love does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right - yea, as long as he's wrong and I'm right.

I can remember times feeling badly about reading this Scripture to couples getting married, presenting it as if this is how they better behave when I knew that I didn't always do such a great job of it. And I'm the minister and I absolutely adore and cherish my husband and I still don't always do really well with following Paul's words.

We have the words of 1 Corinthians 13 hanging in our home and from time to time I'd find my eyes literally looking right at it and I would be like - Oh come on. How can I be all that!

The thing that has struck me in recent years is that Paul was telling us what love is - love is patient, kind, it is not irritable or resentful or rude, it doesn't insist on its own way - that's what love is.

That's not how people who love each other act all the time - at least not anywhere in this life.

It's a reminder to get back on track - remember, love is patient, remember, love is kind.

And, as I said, while it is a great Scripture for people who are committed to loving one another, it was not written for couples, it was written to the people of the Corinthian Church.

They obviously weren't getting it right when it came to loving others or else Paul would not have felt the need to give them this very detailed and really rather practical list of what love ought to look like.

They were no doubt doing some good things, but they weren't being loving.

You can almost imagine Paul saying it like this, Love is patient, it's not impatient, love is kind, it's not being unkind to each other.

The thing that hits me most about Paul's words is the very thing that hits me most about Jesus' words.

When they were talking to people, they almost never said anything about other people's behavior - they didn't talk to church folk or disciples or followers about correcting the behavior of that person over there, or so and so who isn't here today, or that group that lives over there.

They talked about changing the behavior of the very people they were talking to - people like you and me.

Paul called upon the people of Corinth and the people of Galatia, and the people of Thessalonica and all the early churches to change their own behavior, and to love more.

Jesus called upon the very people he was speaking to, to remake themselves by loving others more and by loving God more.

This passage that talks about what love looks like calls me to examine how loving I am and there are lots of specifics in it that I can work on - being more patient, more kind, less irritable, less demanding, etc.

It doesn't call upon me to think about how you or you or you needs to work on being more loving.

It is so much easier to talk about some one else's faults than to admit our own.

I think that's why there is so much gossip and as the kid's say "smack talking" going on about other people - it's an easy way to make ourselves feel better.

I might not be treating my spouse or partner very well, I might not be spending much time with my kids, I might not be completely honest in business dealing, but hey, at least I'm not like that so and so - did you hear what he did? Did you see how she acted?

It's an easy fix to making ourselves feeling better.

The only problem is that it doesn't work.

An addict feels better when they do their drug or behavior of choice, but it's only a superficial feeling better because they haven't dealt with their problems.

If you asked any psychologist or psychiatrist, they'd tell you that they help people change their own behavior and actions, they don't teach people how to change others.

Well, what about evangelism, you might say?

Shouldn't we try to talk people into coming to church.

Tell them why they need to be here.

Think about what works though - if I work on finding ways for me to be more accepting of

others, if I work on finding ways for me to be more loving, for me to more closely follow in Jesus foot steps, for me to have a deeper prayer life with God, for me to be more caring and concerned about others, for me to see the blessings and joy in the everyday, don't you think it will show and others will want to have a piece of that joy that I've found and I won't have to do any convincing.

Paul tells us what love looks like - this is what love is, but we know as humans that we're not always loving, but God is. God is patient and kind. God does not rejoice in wrong but rejoices in the right.

I can not always and at all times with everyone be all of those qualities of love, but God can and God can help to make me more loving when I am open to the leading of God's Holy Spirit.

Often in Christianity, we say , "it's not about us" meaning that we need to think of others, but in this case when Paul is telling the Corinthians and us today how to be more loving - it is all about us.

We can spend time trying to fix others or point out others problems or flaws or bad behavior but that doesn't change a thing about us and God calls us to grow in love and growing means changing to some degree.

Whenever someone has talked to be about getting a divorce I always remind them that they still have to deal with themselves and therefore all of the problems they had will not go away because they are part of the contention in their marriage.

That applies to all of our dealings with people - we are always part of the problem and we always have the opportunity to be the catalyst for change. All you have to do is go to a check out clerk and see if he or she responds differently if you are friendly and respectful versus if you are nasty and demanding - our behavior to others has a huge impact.

Try it out at home too.

In any kind of loving relationship, if you decide to be supportive and caring and supportive, if you express gratitude to the other person and offer a listening and sympathetic ear, it will almost always be reciprocated.

The problem is that too often we spend all of our time complaining about the other person needing to change instead of discovering what we can do to make the situation more loving. Love is what transforms situations and love is what transforms people.

We can complain that others don't do their share of the work at our church or that others don't do enough outreach, or that others aren't Christ centered enough, or that others are engaging in immoral behavior, or that others are sinning or that others are lazy or that others don't understand the meaning of the gospel - we can do all of that and it won't make us any closer to God. Or, we can decide that we're going to look for something more that we ourselves can do, and we can decide that we're going to get involved in more outreach and that we're going to center ourselves more on Christ and that we can decide that we're going to really look at some of our behaviors and see where we need to be more understanding and patient and loving and kind and accepting, and we can decide that we're going to name some of our own sins and that we're going to pray and read the Scriptures and listen to others so that we can understand the meaning of the gospel better - and all of that my friends, will bring you and me closer to God.

And the wonderful thing about God' love is that when we give more love, so do others. It is contagious.

Once, a father was looking after his children and trying to keep them entertained and so he had an

idea on this rainy day.

He took out a page from a magazine of a map of the world printed on the page and he cut it up into small pieces, jumbled them up and placed them in a pile on the floor like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

He told the boys to put it together. You can imagine his amazement when after only five minutes the boys had the map neatly and accurately put back together again. "How did you manage to put it back together again so quickly? He asked them" "Oh, it was easy", the younger boy replied. You told us it was a map of the world and a first we didn't know where to begin and it seemed impossible but then we realized that there was a picture of a man on the other side, so we just put the man back together again. When we turned it over, the world had come back together again. "Yes, said the older brother" It's easy. If you put the person right, the world is O.K."

It's often easy to see what is wrong in others. It takes strength and character and commitment to see what is wrong within ourselves.

Paul calls us to be more loving in his day and in our day and the good news is that when we turn to God for help for ourselves, we will discover the capacity for love like we never imagined.

God is love and when we become more loving toward others, the blessings that will follow are out of this world!