

The Language of Love
January 31, 2010
1 Corinthians 13:1 – 13

**Our reading today comes from the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians verses 1 through 13.
Please listen now for the Word of God for the people of God.**

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If 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. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.

⁸Love 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. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹When 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. ¹²Now 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.

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

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant in us the same Spirit to be truly wise and ever rejoice in the consolation of Your Spirit. Liberate us from all that keeps us from you. Heal us from every form of ailment and sin. Empower us to be a community of love growing always in your likeness; seeking Your Will and Your Way for our lives.

In the meditations of our hearts and in the words of my lips, speak to us today, Oh Lord. In Christ wonderful and Holy name we pray. Amen!

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. (1 Cor. 13:1) The opening words of our scripture reading today may be brief, but they are certainly full of wisdom and speak volumes about our responsibility not only as Christians but as members of a more global, human society, to remember to love. It was once written that, “We hear, ‘Love makes the world go round,’ and ‘Love heals all wounds.’ These are familiar themes: love of friends, ideas and self. Love of God and country,” write the prophets, “Even love of life itself. If I could

only have one word for all eternity, love would be my choice.” (<http://www.careerlab.com/comments.htm>) It isn't enough for us to know God's Word, to hold It within our hearts and to be able to dialogue with one another about the intricacies of its power and meaning in our lives. We must also be able to express those truths to one another and most importantly to a lost and dying world in a language that is understood by everyone; regardless of where they are in their own walk in life, regardless of their own knowledge of biblical truths and in lieu of their own construct of Christianity. We must start with a language that is universally understood and that is the language of *love*.

This past weekend the Governing Board of our denomination met and reflected on International Christian Community Church's place in God's Kingdom. Though a relatively young denomination, we have accepted God's call to reach out and to minister to the marginalized cultures of our communities. In doing so, we have consciously asked ourselves, “What does that mean for us and how are we called to be different? We are more than just another church and we are certainly more than just a gay church. So then, what exactly is ICCC to bring to the table that other mainstream denominations may or may not be overlooking?” In attempting to answer these questions we began by first scripting a vision statement for our denomination:

International Christian Community Churches is a denomination which exists to build and foster Christ – like community where the Kingdom of God will break forth.

In continuing to develop our vision for ICCC, our denomination chose the theme, *The Kingdom of God Breaking Forth*, for last year's denominational conference which brought us a strong message of responsibility in bringing God's Word into a world that has come to forget God's Truth provides us more than a good sermon on Sunday morning, but rather provides each of us a model for daily living. So often we hold to the teachings of doctrine and legalism void of relationship and reconciliation with a God that loves us, provides for us and has promised to nurture our every need, if only we trust in him. Trusting in one another is good. It gives us familiarity and makes us feel safe. However, apart from the

almighty protecting hand of God, we are no better off than anyone who finds comfort in the world and fails to recognize the importance of God's unfailing, perfect love in their lives.

There is so much judgment in the world today. There is so much anger and hatred for mankind; for those who do not *fit the mold*, so to speak. These are those we have referred to as the marginalized of society and they are the ones we, as a denomination and a local faith community, have been called to bring the radically inclusive message of Love offered to us by the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is breaking forth in Toccoa, Georgia but only because it has first been allowed to break forth within each of us. Legalism, indoctrination, ignorance and fear have kept many of us for so much of our lives bound and rejecting of not only one another, but of ourselves to only discover that God really does love us and desires to be in relationship with us; not the us the world wants us to be, but rather the true us God has created us to be.

Genesis relays to us that we were created in the very image of God; an image that speaks to more than just our physical nature, but rather speaks more to our purpose and being . . . that is, our ability and responsibility to love. A great and wise theologian once said, "God don't make no junk," and I am inclined to agree. So what about Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini or the Reverend Fred Phelps? Are they junk? Were they created in the image of God? Yes, they were. However, they failed to carry out the Great Commandment given to us by Christ to, "Love the Lord our God with all our being and to love our neighbor more than we love ourselves." Their lack of love became displaced by hatred. These men, because of their lack of love, have robbed and are continuing to rob nations of people of the true message of Christ.

Looking back over my own life I see that I missed out on so much in failing to recognize God's unconditional love for me. In allowing myself to believe that I was any less important or deserving of God's love than any other, I allowed myself to be robbed of not only relationship with my God, but with those around me. International Christian Community Churches, Lighthouse Ministries of Clayton, New Day Worship Center and each and every one of us here today who have been told time and time again

that we are not loved by God and have since discovered that this is simply not the case have come together under God's authority to reach out to those among us and around us to ensure that this does not become the story for the next generation to come. We have been called to bring the love of our Creator into a lost and dying world.

Our scripture reading this morning tells us many things about love. We find here in the words of Paul that this love of God that so much of the world today – be they poor, Hispanic, Appalachian American, Native American, Asian, Black or members of other disenfranchised groups such as women or gays – are told they are undeserving of is much more inclusive than many would like to believe. Love is patient, love is kind . . . it does not boast, it is not proud . . . it is not rude, self-seeking, or easily angered . . . it keeps no record of wrongs. These are beautiful words; words of encouragement and acceptance, not words of rejection or isolation. How can this be then? How can one simple emotion like love carry so much power and acceptance? Simply stated, it is because *God is Love*. The author of 1 John has this to say about it “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” (4:16)

In the study of mathematics, there is a property of equality called the *transitive property*. Simply stated, it equates a series of statements that share a common relationship. For example, If Pastor Anthony is the same age as Chris and Chris is the same age as Ben Affleck, then Pastor Anthony is the same age as Ben Affleck. This property of mathematics draws a logically sound connection between seemingly obvious relationships that otherwise may be overlooked. Keeping this in mind, consider the following statement: If God is love and love is patient, then God is patient, or if God is love and love keeps no record of wrongs, then God keeps no record of wrongs. Continuing with this line of thought let me continue with the following paraphrase of this morning's reading.

“Love suffers when someone fails or when tragedy strikes. Love takes no pleasure in sin or wrongdoing of any kind. Love is most interested in the truth winning out, even when the truth hurts . . .” That is, “God suffers when someone fails or when tragedy strikes. God takes no pleasure in sin or wrongdoing of any kind. God is most interested in the truth winning out, even when the truth hurts. God lends a shoulder to bear the burdens of others and never breaks their confidence. God believes the best in people and tries hard to trust them – Even when God feels someone is wrong, lying, or making a huge mistake, God still hopes for the best possible outcome. And when God is disappointed and crushed by bearing, believing and hoping, God endures the hurt and embarrassment with cheer and restraint, always continuing to be God – to be love.

So where does that leave us this morning? It leaves us with a message of encouragement, of hope and most importantly of love. As a community of faith, we nurture one another weekly and we strive to foster the best within each of us; to foster relationship and reconciliation not only with one another but most importantly with our Creator. *One God, One Love.* These four words were given to us by God through our brother and friend, J.R. just a few short months ago. Isn't it amazing how these words continue to find so much meaning in so many ways? Our reading today ends in much the same way that it began; with a few simple words that contain such a powerful message for us. Verse 13 relays this message to us, “Three great forces motivate the church: faith, hope and love. “These powerful attributes are the basis for everything the church is doing in the world today. But even when you narrow it all down to these three, at the top of the list you'll find love.” (Jonathan Jordan – see link above)

Even when you narrow it all down to these three, at the top of the list you'll find *God*. In all the chaos we encounter every day, in all our struggles, in all our pains, with all the social injustice we are forced to endure and all the prejudice we are subjected to daily we must continue to look to the One that is at the top of the list – our Creator, our God. Let us find comfort in the words of Keith Wards hymn which read, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean of Jesus' name. . . His oath, His covenant, His blood Support me in the

whelming flood; when all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.” (The Solid Rock)

Have you accepted the love of God for your life today? Have you come to know the truth behind the radically inclusive message of Jesus Christ? If, not then I implore you do to so today. God is love and he is calling you into relationship today. Won't you accept the gift of eternal life and salvation offered to you today? While we sing our sermon hymn, Amazing Love, know that this altar is open for any who need a time of prayer and reconciliation. The world has told so many of you that you are undeserving of God's love; won't you give God an opportunity this morning to tell you what love is really about. Amen!