

Title: "Love Endures All Things"

I Corinthians 13 (NT p. 175)

Introduction – How important is love?

The Bible says, "God IS love" (I John 4:8). Jesus says that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In this morning's text, we read that "faith, hope and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love." We were created to love, and be loved.

In his book *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman writes:

Love is not our only emotional need. Psychologists have observed that among our basic needs are the need for security, self-worth, and significance. Love, however, interfaces with all these.

If I feel loved by my spouse, I can relax, knowing that my lover will do me no ill. I feel secure in his/her presence. I may face many uncertainties in my vocation. I may have enemies in other areas of my life, but with my spouse I feel secure.

My sense of self-worth is fed by the fact that that my spouse loves me. After all, if he/she loves me, I must be worth loving. My parents may have given me negative or mixed messages about my self-worth, but my spouse knows me as an adult and loves me. Her/his love builds my self-esteem.

The need for significance is the emotional force behind much of our behavior. Life is driven by the desire for success. We want our lives to count for something. We have our own idea of what it means to be significant, and we work hard to reach our goals. Feeling loved by a spouse enhances our sense of significance. We reason, 'If someone loves me, I must have significance.'

I would say this true to the extent that we have a perfect spouse. Unfortunately, we are not perfect and those we love are not perfect so relationships can become strained, dysfunctional and even destructive. Therefore, the greatest security, the deepest self-worth and the ultimate significance, comes from our relationship with God through our faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the only One who loves us perfectly and we can rest assured that if we have faith in Jesus, nothing in heaven or earth can separate us from that love.

Although the Lord loves us more deeply than anyone else, including ourselves, we cannot have physical contact with God. So, it is worth our while to find a person to love and to be loved by another. In Chapman's book, he writes that in order for us to feel loved, we have to be loved by someone who uses our own love language. He then gives five love languages, which are: words of encouragement, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and PHYSICAL TOUCH. I will be preaching on Physical touch this morning.

1. Physical touch

Pete and Patsy were two people mentioned in the book. When they were first married, their relationship was great. Then Pete's job became more demanding, so he had to spend longer hours at work. Pete and Patsy gradually drifted apart emotionally. She complained that he was always busy, always thinking about work. He simply became more distant, spending much of his time at home on his computer.

Then they went for counseling. Pete said:

"I was so insecure in my own sense of self-worth that it took forever for me to be willing to identify and acknowledge that her lack of touch had caused me to withdraw. I never told her that I wanted to be touched, although I was crying inside for her to reach out and touch me. In our dating relationship, I had always taken the initiative in hugging, kissing and holding hands, but she had always been responsive. I felt that she loved me, but after we got married, there were times when I reached out to her physically and she was not responsive. Maybe with her new job responsibilities she was too tired. I don't know, but I took it personally. I felt that she didn't find me attractive. Then I decided I would not take the initiative because I didn't want to be rejected. ...My withdrawal was to stay away from the pain I felt when I was with her. I felt rejected, unwanted, and unloved."

Patsy said:

"He's right. I would go weeks without touching him. It didn't cross my mind. I was preparing meals, keeping the house clean, doing his laundry, and trying to stay out of his way. I honestly did not know what else I could be doing. I could not understand his withdrawal or his lack of attention to me. It's not that I dislike touching; it's just that it was never that important to me. Spending time with me is what made me feel loved and appreciated, giving me attention. It really didn't matter whether we hugged or kissed. As long as he gave me attention, I felt loved."

His love language? PHYSICAL TOUCH. ...Her love language? Spending QUALITY TIME together. Once they realized this, she started to reach out and touch him and he began to feel loved. He also began to spend quality time with her and she started to feel loved. After that, their relationship began to improve dramatically.

2. Can a marriage die?

In Tuesday's *Ithaca Journal* there was a letter to "Annie's Mailbox" from a woman who signed herself as "Lonely with Him." She has been married to her husband for 32 years. They have two children. He has slept on the couch each night for the past 20 years, while she slept in her room. He told her early on that she was the third priority in his life, with the kids coming first and just about everything else coming second.

Is there any hope for that marriage? ...I would say yes. Why? She writes, "I still love him." It's hard to love someone who refuses to love you. Jesus, however, tells us to love our ENEMIES (Matthew 5:43-48). Loving an enemy is what loving an unloving person can be like.

There CAN be RESURRECTION of a dead marriage. Chapman chronicles many marriages that defibrillator paddles couldn't even get a pulse get started. But it happened. It usually involved one finding the other's love language and slowly, patiently, feeding him or her love. And, eventually, that love caused a change in the other person that inspired her or him to respond with their love language.

Does it always work? No. Divorce happens. Those who have been through it know how devastating it is. Just as having someone love you gives you security, self-worth and significance, so the process of divorce can bring insecurity, self-loathing and the feeling of INsignificance.

It's in the midst of such times that you need to rely on God's love. And it's then that you also find out who your friends are. And, I would say that you find out who your church is. I try my level best to be supportive and non-judgmental with people going through a divorce. I also try to connect each person with someone of the same gender who has been through a similar experience.

There is only one perfect Person ...and it's not me, and it's not you. God is the God of second chances ...and third chances ...and forth chances. ...Love is always worth another chance. As it says in "Desiderata": "Neither be cynical about love, for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, [love] is as perennial as the GRASS."

3. God and physical touch

One of GOD'S love languages is physical touch. Because God is Spirit, we cannot physically touch God, but there ARE ways we can get close to God.

One way is through COMMUNION. In Communion, we take the physical bread and the juice and remember Jesus' love and his body and blood sacrificed for us. Jesus said, "Wherever two or more are gathered in my name, there I will be in your midst." The real presence of Jesus is with us when we take Communion.

BAPTISM is another way we connect with God. When Jesus was baptized, God said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." When we are baptized with physical water, God says the same thing: "You are my beloved daughter, you are my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased."

These are ways in which we have contact with God, who is Spirit. But how do we make PHYSICAL contact? ...That is up to us. We experience God's physical TOUCH when we gather together to worship, to share a meal, attend a class or go to a meeting. We are GOD'S people. If physical touch is not your "thing" that's fine. If it is, offer a handshake. I'm not an indiscriminate hugger, but if you want a hug, I'm glad to share a hug.

Conclusion -

Speaking to his disciples, Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you." The verb Jesus used here is eklegomai, which actually means "to join or ASSEMBLE." In Denmark, in 1947, little plastic toy bricks held together with tiny pegs were invented. The name chosen for these bricks was the middle of the word Jesus chose: "Lego."

I think Jesus was saying that we did not assemble on our own, Jesus assembled us. We are each different from the other, and we assemble in different shapes to form worship, to put on a women's retreat or to provide for the poor of the world through One Great Hour of Sharing.

But when we ARE snapped together we are stronger and better than we are when we are an individual. And when we touch each other, we are, in a real sense, touching the very presence of God.

Amen.