

## “LOVE IS...”

Based on 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

*A Favourite of  
Elizabeth Creechan*

“Love is patient. Love is kind.” Words we have heard at many a wedding. Whether a giggling blushing bride just out of school, or a seasoned woman of the world, when it comes to weddings, this is the most requested passage of scripture; its words a reminder to the bride and groom of what they should be striving for in the subtle and not so subtle inner workings of relationships between husband and wife.

Interestingly enough, though, within the last few weeks, I have heard these very words spoken at two funerals: one as a reminder of an individual who had lived his life and raised his children with just such principals in mind. The second, a reminder that even when the world does not play fairly, and that we in our humanity, only “Know in part...what one day we will fully know,” (v12) there is still love in this world. We must still love, and not become lost in the things we do not yet comprehend.

So it may be a bit of a challenge for us to tear ourselves away from these images of wedding bells or funeral solemnity, but we must, for a few minutes. Because Paul never intended

these words for either. They were written for a church in Corinth. They were written to scold the church in Corinth. They were written to coax and goad the parishioners to get their act together, to get back on track.

Something had gone awry in Corinth. Perhaps it was the cosmopolitan city with all its sights and smells. Perhaps it was the variety of temptations and distractions that large cities afford: trendy night life, cultural festivities, stories of its many peoples from many different places. Perhaps it wasn't the city, as much as people problems: too many fine going church people wanting to be in charge, too many opinions on the 'right way to do church', too many interpretations of what they thought Paul had instructed them to do and be for the city's Christian community. It's hard to know just what the details were, but something was wrong in Corinth. Worship was happening: hymns were being sung, prayers prayed, scriptures read. The church was reaching out into the community. But something was missing.

*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 gain nothing. (v1-3).*

Love was missing. Not romantic love, or Hollywood style love. Godly love. Affection. Benevolence. Charity. Brotherly, sisterly love for one another; what C.S. Lewis would have called, 'agape' love. Love was missing in Corinth. For all their 'Christian' efforts to be the church, they had somehow forgotten, or lost sight of the single most important part about being a Christian church: having God in the building!

How did this happen? Not intentionally. Not maliciously. No. Like most things, probably quietly and over time, when the Christians of Corinth weren't looking. When tired eyes missed the moment to share the Good News. When weary feet refused one more kind act. When tempers flared instead of thoughtful words that should have been said instead. When unspoken fear and anxiety became disguised as 'someone

else's problem'. Lingering bitterness or pettiness fueled the next issue that arose and before you know it, the Christians of Corinth were fighting over whether to use the hymn book or the song book on Sunday morning, instead of thinking about the words they were singing! The rest of Corinth looked to the church, and wondered, "Who is this God they speak of? Is this what God looks like?"

Paul was not happy. He scolded church members to stop behaving like children. He reminded them that Godly love of self, of one another, of the needs of the community was more than skin deep. God must be in their every act of kindness. They must be patient with one another, they must not hold grudges, or insist on having their own way. They must be role models of what

Godly love and Godly living looked like. It was a difficult message. One wonders, how well it was received.

It is still a difficult message to hear. Humbling to consider, "Is God in our building? Is God in our home? Is God in me?" The temptations and the trappings of the world still exist today. It is easy to become busy, blind sided, and beguiled by the 'work' we do, the routines we keep, the way we think about things and people...and believe that we are doing "God's work" and living "God's way." But in the quietness of a private moment, have you stopped to ask yourself, "Am I really doing God's work? Am I really living the way God would have me live? Am I really loving the way God would have me love?"

Because love, true love, Godly love, is patient and it is kind.

*"It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (v4.7)*

Love never fails. (v8) And while the world may fail us, and discourage us, and try to dissuade us from our dreams and plans, God's love will never fail us. He will not fail our church. He will not fail our families. He will not fail us. We may not understand fully what His plan is. But He will not fail us.

*"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (v13)*