

Epiphany 4C: 1/30/22
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“Love waits patiently, love acts kindly . . . Love never fails.”

That’s another way of translating the famous passage from I Corinthians 13 we had as our first reading. I’m guessing you’ve heard it before. Perhaps ...

Slide #1 – Taylor’s wedding in red oval



. . . at a wedding or two? Or ten?

It’s perfectly appropriate to read on the occasion of two people coming together to pledge and celebrate their love.

But you may have heard this passage at other times too.

Slide #2 – Ruth’s funeral on yellow



Maybe at a funeral or memorial service?

Although it’s not one of the passages suggested in the Prayer Book for funerals, it’s certainly comforting to hear during a liturgy honoring a departed loved one.

Even so, these occasions were not the context for which our namesake Paul first offered these now-famous words.

Slide #3 – Open Bible on gray and gold



This chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 comes, predictably, between chapters 12 and 14.

We might say it's the "spiritual glue" that holds these chapters together. This whole section is about using spiritual gifts for the common good. How they're all needed in the Body of Christ. How an eye can't say to a hand, "I have no need of you." The folks in Corinth had gotten into some sort of competition about which gifts are most valuable. Paul says they ALL are. Whatever your gift, however humble or grand, it's vital; what matters is that you offer it with LOVE. Love is the greatest of all gifts.

Slide #4 - - Green "Be Loved" Collage



Love, according to our namesake Paul, isn't just a feeling. It's not sentimental or even particularly romantic. It's a decision, an action, a way of life. Love is (mostly) a verb. It's what we do. It's who we are. It's how people will even know that we're Christians (as the popular hymn says.) We love because we are loved -- by God. We share that love and put that love into action in this world that God so loves.

Slide #5 – Birds in snow on navy



That's what we're to be about in everything we do as a Christian community. And as a member of this body, it's what we're each to be about every day, wherever we are. There may be someone you need to reach out to today. To make amends? Or maybe it's just been too long? Check how they're doing in all this snow. Maybe they need help digging out or getting groceries. Maybe they need to know you're praying for them today. These are not different things – they're all manifestations of the same gift, which is Love.

Slide #6 – People wearing masks collage on bright blue



These days, one of the most practical ways to express love is by wearing a mask in public. Get vaccinated if you're not already, then boosted.

I know you've heard all this before as a public health directive.

But I'm talking about it as a theological issue, a spiritual discipline.

We can't know everyone's situation. What they're dealing with and who in their lives might be vulnerable or immunocompromised.

We are called to do everything in our power to love them.

To love our neighbors as ourselves.

Slide #7 – Way of Love graphic



There's a reason it's called the Way of Love -- these simple words to help us form a rule of life for following Jesus and changing the world. God in Christ is love. God chose to take the step of sending Jesus Christ to show us how to live, and especially how to love.

We're to walk – to move forward -- with him and each other, in the way of love.

Slide #8 – Embroidered cross on burgundy



At most every wedding, I point out that it's God's love we're celebrating and witnessing in action.

The love between the two people taking vows is but a manifestation of God's love. They may not recognize it on their wedding day, but they can't make it

on their own steam, alone.

They'll need to draw deep within the boundless reservoir of God's love.

The divine love that waits patiently, acts kindly, and never fails.

The divine love which is pure gift, and the *greatest* gift.

Slide #9 – Chalk Cross & heart on purple



The same is true for each of us in every relationship, in everything we do.

I invite you this Lord's Day to look back upon the week just past.

Remembering that love is a verb, consider times when you shared the love of God in very specific, maybe mundane, actions this week.

You may not have seen it that way at the time, but that's what it was.

Now think about the week ahead.

So many opportunities to walk the way of love,

to practice the love of the One who first – and still -- loves you.

Thanks be to God.

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