

# An End To Childish Ways

## 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,  
but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries  
and all knowledge, and if I have all faith,  
so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give away all my possessions,  
and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,  
but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful  
or arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;  
it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things,  
endures all things. Love never ends.

But as for prophecies, they will come to an end;  
as for tongues, they will cease;  
as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part;  
but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child,  
I reasoned like a child;  
when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.  
Now I know only in part; then I will know fully,  
even as I have been fully known.

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;  
and the greatest of these is love.

## **An End To Childish Ways**

I Corinthians 13:1-13

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Rev. Michael Catanzaro

### **I.**

This morning, with Valentine's Day a mere two weeks away, we come to the very familiar 13th chapter of I Corinthians where the Apostle Paul extols the reader to abide these three: faith, hope, and love. With the greatest of these being love. Certainly if you've been to only two weddings in your life, there is a 50/50 chance you've heard this passage read, as it is obviously quite appropriate for such an occasion; with the passage being every bit as eloquent as it is instructive.

Given the odds just mentioned, I would guess I have read this passage upwards of a couple of hundred times when considering how many weddings I've officiated over the years. More recently, however, I've had cause to read this passage at a funeral or two: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now we know only in part; then we will know fully, even as we have been fully known."

### **II.**

While it would certainly be fitting to use "love" as the subject of today's sermon, I'd like us to take a less obvious approach to the passage, with the bread crumbs of recent events leading the way. As I've gotten older, and with each wedding I do, I am left with the sinking feeling that I've been woefully inadequate in preparing the newly married couple for the rigors and challenges of married life. For those of you who have *been* married, *are* married or, as in my case, *re*-married, you are well aware of just how hard one has to work at their marriage; throughout all the stages of one's life.

Nowhere is this more readily apparent than if, and when, children come onto the scene. Delightfully, our church is currently in the midst of something of a fertile period with the recent birth of Rosie to Jarrett and Marion, Cati and Bill soon to welcome a child April 1st, and with Anna and James expecting a child June 27th.

### **III.**

More wonderful, are the great many families in our congregation with children; and young children at that. Janet Stitt and I recently completed the denomination's annual Statistical Report and I am pleased to share with you that pre-school and school-aged children are the fastest growing demographic here in our church. (So keep having those babies!)

Let's be honest, though. While certainly a joy, raising kids, even in the best of times, is something of a slog; made infinitely more difficult with COVID. Sometimes, when you're in the midst of it, it is difficult to see beyond the runny nose you are wiping, the diaper you are changing, the back you are burping, the homework with which you are helping the baths you are drawing, and the bedtime stories you are reading. In such moments it is particularly important to remember that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and, especially, endures all things.

### **IV.**

Frankly, it doesn't get any easier, either, as kids enter adolescence with hormones surging, the specter of social acceptance lurking and adulthood looming. In the midst of all that, changing a diaper doesn't seem like much of a burden. The truth of it is, your kids never stop being your kids no matter how old they are, and a parent's job is never done; not really. That is, until the tables turn as they are spun around by the swift moving current of time as it inevitably marches on, and kids are called to start caring for their parents, even as they still parent their own kids.

Which is right where I happen to find myself at this period in my life, with our youngest kid finishing his junior year in college, and my mother in an assisted living facility. As an example, this past week we sent a care package to one, and ordered new bras and underwear for the other; the trick is to keep the addresses straight.

### **V.**

As a parent who is also a pastor, I can tell you there is no end to the delight to be found in being present to watch those in one's congregation begin a family, raise children and support them as they move through the various developmental stages. It is both a joyful and humbling experience, with no small amount of humor to be found along the way.

As we begin a third year with COVID, I can tell you that the hardest part of it, professionally, is simply not seeing the children of our church on any kind of regular basis. Each Sunday, though, I'm thankful for whatever small slice we are allotted. Take last Sunday, for example. There was the immense joy in meeting Rosie for the very first time, the heart-tug of singing to Walter on the occasion of his 4th birthday, basking in the on-going amusement as Kate and Emily rush headlong into becoming the young women they are, and ushering Cameron through the process of reducing yet another mountain to a mole hill.

## **VI.**

After church last week, I was speaking to Jim Franklin, father of Grace, Andrew and Maria, each of whom are on their own unique journey. He used a term which has recently emerged in common parlance, "adulthood." Though I had heard it before, this time it gave me pause. "Adulthood" is defined as the practice of behaving in a way characteristic of a responsible adult, especially the accomplishment of mundane but necessary tasks that adults are expected to do. Personally, I find the term somewhat amusing when used in a sentence "Jane is adulthood quite well today as she is on time for work promptly at 8 a.m. and appears well-groomed." "Adulthood" is pop culture phenomena and phrase coined by, or for, the specific demographic born between the early 1980s and early 2000s; what has been labeled the "Millennials" or "Generation Y." Why there should now, suddenly, need to be a term to describe something that every generation has undertaken and accomplished I cannot say.

## **VII.**

It is a rather telling term, however, and I don't think the scope of it is limited in anyway to just one generation. In fact, I think the whole notion is as old as the hills. Here is what the Apostle Paul had to say about it 2000 years ago in today's scripture reading: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways."

I began today's sermon by pointing out that Valentine's Day will soon be upon us. In our family, the occasion holds special meaning as it is the anniversary of the day that I adopted our daughter Nicole. Though I had certainly been "adulthood" up until that point, suddenly taking on the life-long responsibilities of raising a child forced me, in no uncertain terms, to put an end to my own childish ways.

## **VIII.**

It wasn't easy and it wasn't quick, however. I remember, though, the moment it began. It was before before Linda and I were even married. We were sitting down to a meal together with Nicole, and something special was on the menu (though what, specifically, I cannot recall). At some point, in a chivalrous gesture, I gave some of my food to Linda for her to enjoy, only then to have 4 year old Nicole want it from Linda's plate; which, of course, she gladly gave to her. However, this made me a little resentful. Worse, I resented being made to feel resentful.

At some point, and I'm embarrassed to say that it certainly was not right away, I came to realize that *I* had to be the parent; *I* had to put an end to my own childish ways and be the adult in the situation. In fact, I don't think it an exaggeration to say that I've been engaged in the very same process just about every day for the past 25 years; and not just with each of my children, but with my faith journey as well.

## **IX.**

One of the great challenges we face whenever we study scripture is leaving our assumptions at the door. Whether or not we mean to, we always bring some intent and some history to every chapter and verse in the Bible. Today's reading from I Corinthians 13 is a vivid example, as it is almost impossible to read it without invoking thoughts of a wedding ceremony. We can hardly expect, though, that Paul wrote these words anticipating such a future use. Even if they are quite applicable to married life, it is safe to assume that Paul was painting on a much broader canvas. While we can greatly mitigate the tendency to minimize content for our own purposes by understanding the historical context in which the words were written (in this case, to deal with problems in the congregation he established) the more important consideration is what the Holy Spirit might be saying through these words that we are not necessarily seeking to hear.

## **X.**

If we begin with the assumption that in this passage Paul is lifting up the primacy of love within the Christian community, even over against hope and faith, we can understand and appreciate his description of love as patient and kind, not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude. That it does not insist on its

own way; nor is it irritable or resentful, or rejoice in wrongdoing but, rather, rejoices in the truth. That love is what makes one be more than a noisy gong or clanging symbol, and more important, even, than handing over one's body. That love is a mystery we know, now, only in part, but that some day we will fully know, just as we will *be* fully known. Now, I don't think it is in anyway a stretch to say that if Paul left this treatise on love at that we would be no less satisfied. Clearly, though, *he* was not.

## **XI.**

We must consider, then, why Paul would include this one additional section about becoming an adult and putting an end to childish ways? Frankly, it would seem to be either a superfluous adornment or, I would argue, the key to understanding everything else in the rest of the passage. Clearly, children are all about love. For couples like Marion and Jarrett, Bill and Cati, and Anna and James, having a child is the embodiment of their love for each other. For all the moms and dads in our congregation, their children are busy at work teaching them about the fruits and joys of loving another. For those with older or grown children we are constantly discovering just how far love can and must stretch. For those who must now care for aging parents as they were once cared for by them, we find the privilege of humility that loves eventually visits upon us all.

## **XII.**

For the Apostle Paul, however, having love, knowing love and being loved are somewhat beside the point. Instead, what he believes matters most to the church at Corinth, and all of us, is *bringing* love; to those in our lives, to the community to which we belong and, ultimately, to the world in which we live. In today's text, Paul calls the reader to put an end to childish ways and be the adult in the situation. To share not just the food from our plates, but also the years of our lives, the fruits of our labors, the gifts we have been given and, especially, the love with which God so brought to the world in Christ.

To express it in a sentence: "The congregation of the Church on the Park is adulting quite well these days, they give of their time, talent and energy promptly when needed, and appear well-graced in loving their neighbor as themselves." And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Amen.