



**A Sermon from Dr. Jody Seymour, Senior Pastor
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The Sermon Text: I Corinthians 13

What's Love Got to Do With It

How many sermons have I preached on love? Over 38 years of doing this, perhaps that topic has come up more than most. Why do we need to hear another sermon on love or, in the words of Tina Turner, "What's Love Got to Do with It?" Standing atop those lovely long legs of hers, Tina belts out:

"What's Love Got To Do With It"

You must understand
That the touch of your hand
Makes my pulse react
That it's only the thrill
Of boy meeting girl
Opposites attract

It's physical
Only logical
You must try to ignore
That it means more than that


[Chorus]

Oh what's love got to do, got to do with it
What's love but a second hand emotion
What's love got to do, got to do with it
Who needs a heart
When a heart can be broken

Seems that the one who composed this song has experienced the complexities and dangers of trying to love, so they chose to ignore "real love" and go for the physical aspects of attraction while attempting to leave love out of the equation. I suppose such an experiment can be done with animals, but our story today tells us that it should not be attempted with humans who are called to a higher form of...yes, love...it seems that love has a "lot to do with it."

This is even true in a very simple way when it comes to those of us who claim the status of being God's highest order of creation. We seem to depend on love.

It's like the man who was walking in the woods one day and looked up and said, "God, I am so grateful for you giving me my wife. Why did you make her so beautiful?" God responded, "So that you would love her, my son." "Then why did you make her so kind?" "So you



would love her, my son,” God again said. “But then why did you make her such a great cook?” “So you would love her, my son,” came the reply.

Then the man thought a moment and said, “So God, why then did you make her so that at times she does really stupid things?” “So she would love you, my son.”

It seems that humans need the gift of love and so alas today, here is another sermon about love because it seems that love does have a lot “to do with it.” Paul’s famous words about love are some of those most familiar in the Bible so they may be in danger of becoming elevator music. We hear it and we hum the tune, but we don’t really take in the words or the meaning.

The reason for this familiarity is that these words are often used in weddings. They sound so..well, so sweet - and after all weddings are supposed to be sweet, are they not? But those of us who are married know that a wedding does not a marriage make and that words as sweet as they may sound fade and the work of marriage soon begins.

It might be good for us to remember that Paul pens these words not as a commissioned piece for someone’s wedding day. These words come from a letter written to a church in a definite place named Corinth. They were not composed to be read just before a solo where we hear “O Perfect Love,” “The Wedding Song,” or “The Lord’s Prayer.” Most of Paul’s letters fall into the category of what is known as “occasional” letters. His correspondences are similar to those I used to get from my grandmother. Grandma Hattie always opened by telling me what was going on in her life, including who died and who was having a baby. Then she started in on some advice-giving for my growing up years. In other words, before we turned Paul’s writings into scripture, they were actual letters written to real people about specific situations.

If you want to get the drift of what I’m trying to say in modern language, it is as if Paul composed a pretty direct e-mail in response to something that occurred and then others got hold of it and sent it on to everybody on their own e-mail contact list. Ever had that happen? That is the way Paul’s occasional letters turned into scripture. Those to whom these concerns were first addressed by Paul ended up sending his words on to other folks at other churches...and they were read there, too.

The trouble is that when you read the e-mail for yourself you do not have in front of you the prior e-mail or situation that created the e-mail you are reading. So, want to know the e-mail that Paul is responding to in the e-mail you heard about love this morning?

Well if you don’t want to, I’m going to tell you anyway. It seems...are you ready for this? Hold on to your hat, you may be shocked...the folks at First Church Corinth were not getting along with each other. Imagine that...church folks not getting along with each other; church folks actually letting religious practice get in the way of loving each other.



When you hear the assertion today that, “I’m spiritual, but I’m not religious,” the seeds for this situation may have been planted in none other than Corinth. It seems that people today who are thirsty for their spiritual needs to be filled often stay away from church because they see us arguing with each other over doctrine, social issues, sexual orientation, and prizing institutional maintenance, while they are looking for water to fill their empty vessels.

The church at Corinth was arguing over who had the best spiritual gifts, who should be in leadership positions, what was right and wrong about sexual conduct, and what kind of worship was “best.” And you thought those issues came from the editorial in the religion section of last week’s newspaper.

So we have people not coming to church who are seeking spiritual answers because they presume by our actions that we are consumed with religious and moral debates. So in the middle of this letter or e-mail if it helps you make it meaningful for now, Paul inserts rather abruptly a sort of lecture on love.

Some biblical scholars think Paul may have used something that was already written to insert into his letter because this chapter seems to almost stand on its own. Just to show you I too have been to seminary, I did some research and found this to be probably true.

Whether Paul composed this lecture on love himself or had some of his students find it; it does appear to be what is called an “epideictic speech” known as an “encomium.” Now that you are impressed, let me break this down in Tina Turner language: Paul, as he is writing his letter, stops and clearly inserts something to get the Corinthian hard-heads’ attention.

It is as if he inserts a link that they can click on that pulls up a You Tube performance, not of Tina, but of something that is like a song about what real love is. Paul interrupts his comments in response to the Corinthians arguing about which worship was best or what doctrines are primary, or what is the best stance toward sexual morality and suddenly the You Tube link plays the music and shows the characters in living color. The power of such a link or insert is the reason, my friends, that we are still playing the You Tube over and over again at weddings. You might say there have been millions of “hits” since Paul first had the brilliance to insert such a link on love.

Want to hear how the You Tube song sounds? “Love is patient and kind, it is not arrogant or rude...love believes all things, hope all things, endures all things...other things will pass away but real love will last forever.”

Paul uses the word, “agape” when he writes of love. Unlike my grandmother’s letters, Paul had at his disposal at least four Greek words he could use for love when we have only one. He could have used “philiis” for friendship kind of love, “eros” for sexual love, or “storge” for family kind of love. Paul uses “agape” which is a kind of unconditional self-giving, it is about the other- kind of love.



Could it be that Paul, having witnessed the Corinthians inability to listen to each other and their great ability to argue over what worship was best or whose sin was worst, knew what researchers have come to know these days about love? In some research put together in what is now known as “the science of love,” it was discovered that much of what we know as love is really chemicals.

Research shows that it only takes us about four minutes to “fancy” someone. Interestingly enough, our initial attraction to another person is not based simply on what he or she says, but rather 55% is based on body language, 38% is based on the tone and the speed of the other’s speech, and only 7 % is based on the actual content of what the other person says.

Helen Fisher, a love researcher at Rutgers University, describes three stages of love and the chemicals that go with each stage. The first stage is “lust” and is ruled by testosterone and oestrogen. The second stage is “attraction” where we become “love struck” and we can’t seem to concentrate on anything else but the source of our attraction. This second stage seems to be ruled by the chemicals in our body known as adrenaline, dopamine, and serotonin. The last stage of love is called “attachment” and because of the nature of attachment I will not vividly discuss it here in church. Use your imagination, which I am sure just got activated. The chemical released at this stage is oxytocin.

This may sound more like the description of a chemistry set rather than a love sonnet. It is important, however, that we distinguish between a very self-centered love that is based a good deal on chemicals and the “gift” kind of love that Paul thinks the Corinthians need to discover.

York professor Arthur Arun used such chemical based research to create a laboratory experience where he worked with couples in a controlled environment. He discovered the following way to fall in love with someone. First, find a complete stranger who will of course cooperate. Two, reveal to each other intimate details about your life for one-half hour. Three, stare deeply into each other’s eyes without talking for four straight minutes. Couples interviewed after the study stated that they felt deeply attracted to each other. Two of the couples got married. All in thirty-four minutes...

So, what’s love go to do with it? Ask Margaret Peterson, who fell in love with a man whom she later discovered had AIDS. She married him and ended up sharing what she learned about love. She wrote that real love seeks not a perfect partner, but a fellow pilgrim. It is based on a trust that is willing to travel uncharted territory.

She shares that the task is not so much to fall in love as to discern whom one can love. The journey of love seeks one whose character is fertile ground for mutual trust and respect.

Real love leads one not so much to self-reliance as to the need for community. Love should not be completely spouse-dependent, but love needs to also be both found and given in a larger community.



Peterson discovered in her own journey that grand plans and gestures are not as important as small blessings and facing challenges together. Love is really not about violins in the background and exotic honeymoons but about planting roots in the soil of everyday blessings.

And finally she offers to those of us who will listen about what love has to do with it the lesson that it not about living happily ever after but about cherishing the moment even when you realize that eventually you have to face death and decide to love anyway. (Taken from Christian Reflection from the Center for Christian Ethics, Baylor University, 2006)

Paul writes a letter to a church that has let religion get in the way of love. They are arguing over policies and doctrines and styles of worship and who has the best spiritual gifts and who is going to be in charge or win the debates. All the while Paul inserts his link to real love that tells the people it is not about the feelings and the hormones or who is right and who is wrong.

Right in the middle of his letter writing he breaks into song to get their attention. In the middle of his lecture on growing up he lists links to real love. Paul says if you think you know so much and have so much let me tell you what you seem not to possess. He then describes a kind of love that is manifest in the life of the one who got him into writing his letters in the first place; none other than the Jesus he met on the road.

The kind of love Paul “sings” about is a deep love that offers itself. In a novel I read this past week a woman whose finds herself in the embrace of a man she never thought she would love says, “In my experience, falling in love has little to do with wanting someone. It is much more enticing to me to be wanted” (*Keeping Faith* by Jodi Picoult, p.202).

Paul ends his interruption about love by saying that real love comes as a gift from the one whom we cannot fully know but who fully knows us. You and I are called to love a God whom we cannot fully know but who fully knows us. We are challenged to love a God whose face we cannot see because of the mystery of life but a face we will one day see. This God is one who sees us face to face because of the deep love this God has for us.

This God offers us not a chemical based love but a love based on the need to receive real love as a gift. What’s love got to do with it? When it comes to God, everything. But as Paul learned when he dealt with those church folks, like us, we need to grow up and be reminded that it is not about doctrines and beliefs and even worship or leadership. It is about “how” we love.

And so almost as if he is writing to children who need instruction in how to learn to love he pens his letter. Since we have heard it so much...even at weddings...I do not want it to be like that elevator music so I leave you with Eugene Peterson’s version of I Corinthians 13 from his translation of the bible entitled “The Message.”



I Corinthians 13

The Way of Love

¹ If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. ²If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. ³⁻⁷If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.

⁸⁻¹⁰Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

¹¹When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

¹²We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

¹³But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.