

In the Corinthian passage assigned for today we hear familiar words; the rhythm and the poetry transport us to memories of weddings and hope. They are words that are among the most familiar in the New Testament. Paul, however, is not pointing toward romantic love, although indeed that is an aspect of love, he is pointing toward the self-giving Love of the Good News that builds up community. Reflecting on love as a radical act and action that binds up a divided, wounded, angry community shapes this text; Paul in his letter is speaking to a community that is not getting along. Evidently, some individuals thought their gifts were better than other people's gifts and Paul pauses to remind the community that what counts first is God's gift of Love. It is given to serve each other in building up of the community of faith. Even more than that, it is the beginning of being able to share that Love with other communities.

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.

This love is not an easy love; saying love does not act irritable or resentful would be a hard task some afternoons...Paul wants us to know it is a necessary love in communities where there is difference and diversity. Pivoting toward kindness in the way we act changes us and changes the community. This Love, this powerful love, God has already given to us to share with others. This love has the power to heal, the power to bring joy, and the power to bring hope. It is the song of rejoicing.

And do we need a special gift to attain this? No, Jeremiah says—we are all called from wherever we are to serve the community around us and no excuse is good enough to say, “I can't do this.” God's own self will give us the words to say, individually and as a community, and the prophet Jeremiah reminds us “do not be afraid” to speak what God gives us to speak in truth to one another. And again, Jeremiah would concur, it is not easy.

In Luke today we hear the rest of the story of Jesus speaking in Nazareth and having to slip away from the angry crowd that perhaps expected Jesus to speak kindly to them, not remind them of the injustices in their own community. As Jesus turns away to teach in another place, we can wonder with the crowd, could he have healed us here in this place, now? Are we open to listen to our hearts in this new encounter with Jesus?



Love Lets Go of Power
Tile from Peace Wall in Hamilton, New Zealand

“Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction. So, when Jesus says, “Love your enemies,” he is setting forth a profound and ultimately inescapable admonition. Have we not come to such an impasse in the modern world that we must love our enemies— or else? The chain reaction of evil—hate begetting hate, wars producing wars—must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.”

Martin Luther King Jr, Strength to Love by Martin Luther King, Jr

Pastor Susan+