



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?”

Scripture Lessons: Mark 9:2-10; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

*This sermon was preached by Rev. Tracey W. Daniel. on Sunday, February 14, 2021
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

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.

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Loving God, we thank you for being with us this morning. We ask that your Holy Spirit guide us as we hear your Word. Help any word beside your own to be closed from us, and only your Word to be heard and impactful to us. In your Son’s name we pray. Amen.

What's love got to do with it? Some of you may remember that question as the title to a popular song performed by Tina Turner back in the 1980s. The pop song explores the question, “What's love got to do with it?” about the relationship that's being described in the song. I chose this title for my sermon today for a couple of reasons... one, because it is Valentine's Day, a day when we celebrate love, and two, because today is a special day in the life of the church. It is the Sunday that we read the story about the transfiguration of Jesus, a story that adds yet one more chapter of God's love story for us by proclaiming that Jesus is our Messiah. So, I would answer the question, “What's love got to do with it?” – everything!

Some of you may be familiar with the story of Jesus’ transfiguration, and of course we've heard it read twice this morning. We generally read this story the Sunday before the beginning of Lent. Much like Advent, which is the season for preparation for Christmas and the birth of Christ, Lent is the season that we prepare for the death and resurrection of Jesus when we prepare for Easter.

The season of Lent can have a pretty somber tone. We're reminded of our mortality. We examine our shortcomings, and we think about the ways that we need to repent and change in our lives. Following this season of Lent, though, we celebrate the good news that Christ cannot be kept from us. No, not even death can separate us from the love of God. That's what love's got to do with it!

God's story is a love story for us, God's creation. God's love story for us begins in the Old Testament, in the book of Genesis. God created the world, and then God created us in God's very own image. As we read the stories of the Old Testament, we read about God's love for God's people over and over again. No matter how many times God's children get off track, God gives us one more chance. And then we move on to the stories of the New Testament. We continue to find evidence of God's love for us, and by the time we get to the passage in Mark today, you and I already know the end of the story. We know why Jesus came to the world, and we know that Jesus is God's love come down for us. But for Peter, James and John, it was a different situation. For them, this story about the transfiguration of Jesus tells them what they may have expected or suspected, that Jesus is God's son.

Many, many years after the experience, Peter tells this story to Mark, and Mark writes it down, and today we can read it. Peter told Mark that one day when he and James and John were with Jesus, that they were invited up the mountain with him. In scripture if anything happens on a mountaintop, that's sort of a signal to stop, pay attention, something really amazing is about to happen. You see, a mountain top is somewhere between earth and heaven, and so when they got on the top of that mountain and they saw something spectacular, when they looked at Jesus, it was like looking at the bright sun. And Jesus wasn't alone either - beside him stood two people from the Old Testament, Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the Prophet. Peter and James and John did not know what to make of what they were seeing, and then all of a sudden, a voice comes out of a cloud and proclaims Jesus is none other than God's own very son. The voice said, "This is my son, I love him. Listen to him."

Throughout history, God has reached out to God's creation. God gave us the law through Moses to help us know how to live God's way. Then God sent the prophets like Elijah, and now in today's scripture, God is confirming that God sends us Jesus into the world, God Incarnate to share God's love with us. That's what love's got to do with it!

God's love story for us continues as the season of Lent begins this week with Ash Wednesday. We remember the end of Jesus' life. We'll move through the next six weeks, preparing our hearts and minds. In our lives, for the Easter story, this is the story that gives us hope beyond hope, that no matter what is happening in our lives today, there's nothing, not even death that can separate us from God's love.

It's appropriate for us to dig a little deeper today into the kind of love God has for us, and this is the same kind of love that God calls us to have for one another. God's love for us is the kind of love that is described by the Greek word agape. Agape is a self-giving love. Jesus exemplified this agape love in the way he lived his life on earth, and the way he was willing to give all that he had for the well-being of another. We might think of this love in contrast to the type of love that the Greeks refer to as eros. Eros is related to the desire for another. Some describe it as a love

attracted by the goodness of the other, reaching out for that good, so that they can be complete. But agape love is unmotivated by what it can get, and it's all about what it can give. It's a perfect kind of love.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he writes about this agape love. This is the kind of love God gives to us and wants us to give to one another. Paul describes it so beautifully that it really doesn't need any explanation. You heard me read the passage just a few minutes ago from the New Revised Standard Version. I would like to read it to you now again from the Message, which is a paraphrase of the Bible by Eugene Peterson:

"If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If 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. If 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... These three faith, hope and love and the best of these three is love." That's what love's got to do with it!

You can see why many couples would choose this passage of scripture for their wedding ceremony. I suspect some of you here use this very passage, unfortunately, we fall short of being able to give this kind of love on our own, but through Christ, we can offer this agape love. When a couple gets married in the church, they make promises to one another, they also confess they can't do it alone, that they need God to be a part of their marriage in order to practice this agape love. This Corinthians passage was written as a way to help the young Christian community living in Corinth, understand what kind of love they were to have for one another. It is the kind of love that we are to have for one another.

When I was a young college graduate, my dad gave me a book, and it had pictures of Norman Rockwell's paintings in it, and in that book, it had some poetry and some stories. One of my favorite things about that book is my dad wrote in the inside of it. First of all that he loved me, which is so special particularly now that he's no longer living, but also what he wrote in there was his favorite story. In the book was the "Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. He said he loved this book because it's the story of true love. Some of you may know the stories and other others of you might not, so I'm going to share a little bit about what the story is. It takes place at Christmas time. It's a young couple, a young man and a young woman, and they were in love with each other and they wanted so much to give something special to each other, but they didn't have much money. So, they kind of, you know, try to think about things they could do, a way to save money, different things. Well, when it came time for the Christmas gifts to be purchased, there still wasn't a lot of money, so they both unbeknownst to the other had this great idea. Each of them had something that was very special to them and they sold those things in order to buy a gift for the other. Well, the young woman had long, wavy, beautiful brown hair, and she sold her hair, and her husband had a very special gold watch, a pocket watch, it had been his grandfather's, and he sold his watch. Well, lo and behold when they opened the gifts, the young

woman had given her husband a beautiful chain for his pocket watch, and the man had given the woman beautiful, jeweled hair combs. This self-giving love, being willing to give what was the most important thing to them for the other, was an example of this sacrificial love. And of course, we always fall short as human beings, but with God, we can count on God's love as always pure, and God will help us to love one another in the same sacrificial way. Self-giving love, putting the other first, this is the love that God gives for us. This is the love that God calls us to give to the other. That's what love's got to do with it. Amen

*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.