

I Corinthians 13

October 4, 2015 World Communion Sunday

the way of love

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After spending two weeks – fourteen days - walking with this text on the Camino de Santiago, I am convinced more than ever that the core of Christianity is love – God’s astonishing love for humanity and our practice of love of others. Scripture is a multi-layered collection of writings across local cultures and long history, so yes there are texts that speak of divine judgment, moral accountability and the consequences of evil doing. That means we have the joyful and, sometimes, daunting task of choosing among all the various texts what is the primary description of God and our proper response. Saint John says, God *is* love and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them. Saint Paul is equally emphatic in his response. *Without love, no other virtues matter.* We know this to be true in our experience.

One can be an eloquent speaker with soaring rhetoric and poetic cadence, yet without love it sounds discordant, like fingernails on a chalkboard. One can be smart as a whip, with a head full of knowledge – our town is full of such persons – and even express the most profound faith possible, but without love, who cares? It all amounts to nothing. That is the lesson at the core of Paul’s theology that is astonishingly radical. Even the most exemplary actions – giving away all your possessions, willingly offering your life – gain nothing if they are done without love as primary source.

We recall that when Jesus was famously asked what is the greatest commandment, he repeated the core of Judaism: *love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.*

Christianity is known for many things yet often forgotten is the most important thing: *love*. The Montana philosopher Albert Borgmann writes about countering the pervasive effects of technology on modern life. He commends local communities, including congregations, to discern their focal concern and live into with all their energies. *I am completely convinced that the focal concern of Christianity is love and that nothing supersedes that concern either in theology or practice.* It is the great good news that shatters the relentless bad news of this world and our broken lives. Saint Paul put it this way in his letter to the Romans: *the proof of God’s amazing love is this: while we were **dead** in our sins, Christ Jesus died for us.* All this for one reason only: that we might experience the love God has for us and walk in newness of life, discovering more and more of the riches of this love and sharing it with others.

I find it disturbing that so many do not associate Christians with love. This is not new; we have a checkered history that we are wise to acknowledge humbly. Yet, once upon a time back in the day we used to sing “they will know we are Christians by our love.” But we are not known by this love. Christians are often known by our divisions, our judgments, our self-righteousness and fear. None of these behaviors display confidence in the God who crossed all barriers including death that his salvation would be known. These distortions can only be countered by living the truth that God *is* love. This love has been made visible in Jesus who

teaches us to live in him – as a branch lives in the vine – so that we will make visible his love in our lives. It all begins here: God first loved us and gave his very life that all may find freedom and live a joyful life in communion with our loving God.

This is the **way** of love and once again I want to emphasize it is a *way of life*. This *way* a process of cultivating love that lasts our lifetime. Your life and mine is made by the choices we make each day. We can choose the way of love as we can choose the way gratitude and prayer and goodness and joy. Again, Saint Paul tells us that God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The source of love for others and ourselves is God’s love in us. Will we fall down and stumble along the way, hurt others and go against the very love we desire most? Yes, indeed, and maybe more than once a day. But this precisely what it is called a way of life. We are not defined by our failures, our sins and transgressions, we are defined by our capacity to fall, ask forgiveness and walk again. We fall, we get up, we keep walking. Siempre Adelante!

As I walked the Camino, I perceived God’s love being manifest in strikingly new ways among people of all cultures. I had no desire to limit the appearance of this love; in fact, walking among modern pilgrims I relished the possibilities of the Church being widened in a new reformation of love bursting the bounds of the current Church.

We grow in God’s love as we walk in love. Let us walk in love; nothing else matters.
Ultré!a!

Amen.