

## LOVE IS ...

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 [MW19-05]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 03 February 2019

When I was 12 years old, I was in the stage show "Oliver"

- one of those wretched workhouse boys who also doubled as Fagin's urchins
- I remember the director explaining to us how the show would open
- the stage would be dimly lit showing the meagre stark workhouse dining room
- then a spotlight would illuminate a sign above the top table which read "God is Love"

God is Love - both God and love seemed a long way from that workhouse orphanage

- nothing in Oliver's life so far contained anything like "love"
- and it was about to get a whole lot worse!

God is Love

- it's a bit like a maths theorem  $2x = y$
- which makes no sense at all unless you know what x or y is
- I don't think Oliver or the others at that workhouse orphanage had a clue about x or y - God or love
- it was not part of their life experience so far

God, love, what's that about - it can even be a problem for people today ...

- how do we know what God is like?
- how do we know what love is?
- how do we know what God's love is?
- well we do have John 3:16 which says:  
*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life*

Can love be explained ?

- I'm not sure

Can love be seen?

- perhaps it's like the wind
- you can't exactly see wind
- but you can see what it does, see its effects, see where it's been
- I think it's similar with love
- you can see its effects, see what it does and what it leaves behind

When I was looking at explanations and definitions of love

- I came across this which remains a favourite - a 6 year old's definition of love:  
Love is when your parents read you a bedtime story  
True love is when they don't skip any pages!

Love is a small word with a big meaning

- of all the dictionaries, encyclopaedias, books and articles though
- Paul in my view comes closest to pinning down this elusive yet wonderful quality we call love
- in chapter 13 of the first letter to the Corinthians

Note however, what Paul says

- you could be the world's greatest preacher and bring thousands to the Lord
- you could explain the deepest mysteries you could be a channel for miraculous events you could be generous beyond measure
- however without love, it just doesn't matter a bean if you have no love ... don't even bother to turn up!
- your efforts will probably have no lasting impact

Then Paul continues with the words most of us know pretty well

- so here's a version you may not be so familiar with from *The Message* translation
- have a listen and see if anything strikes you!

*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.  
Love never dies.*

Anything strike you?

[opportunity for response]

These words from 1 Corinthians 13 are often read at weddings

- and that's fine as long as it doesn't mean we limit them only to marriage or relationships between men and women
- Paul was writing about how God relates to all creation about what it means when we say "God is love" about how God loves

Paul was writing about how Jesus lived and died

- and Paul was writing about the way followers of Jesus, Christians, that's you and me, are to live and die across the board
- not only with spouses, partners, family, relations, friends, neighbours but with everybody who we come across ...
- the whole wide world!

So it's important I guess to be sure what love is

- and you could listen to the songs on the radio  
or read Mills and Boon or Harlequin romances ...
- there's a story about a guy who sends a card to his girlfriend which says:  
I would brave the arctic snow for one glance at your dancing blue eyes  
I would walk across the desert for one touch of your gentle hands  
I would swim the vast ocean for one kiss from your sweet lips  
PS I'll be over Saturday night if it doesn't rain
- true love? I don't think so!

I looked up love in this: *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity*

- it starts off by saying:  
Love, a word much overused and under defined today, is employed promiscuously  
of everything from cars to diapers to dogfood and is largely equated with feelings

Is love a feeling? Hmmh ...

- I lean toward the view love is a decision  
love is not a feeling, love is not a noun  
love is a verb
- love is something you do  
a decision to act in certain ways

Shortly after World War II came to a close, Europe began picking up the pieces. Much of the Old Country had been ravaged by war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of little orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities. Early one chilly morning an American soldier was making his way back to the barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his jeep, he spotted a little lad with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier pulled his jeep to the curb, stopped, got out, and walked quietly over to where the little fellow was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot. The boy salivated and released a slight groan as he watched the cook place them onto the glass-enclosed counter ever so carefully. The soldier's heart went out to the nameless orphan as he stood beside him. "Son, would you like some of those?" The boy was startled. "Oh, yeah - I would!" The American stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag, and walked back to where the lad was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply: "Here you are." As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly: "Mister, are you God?"

For those who would like something a bit more solid and substantial

- a couple of points culled from this big book  
which bills itself as 'An A to Z guide to following Christ in every aspect of life':

Love involves being generous, altruistic and compassionate; valuing the 'neighbour' self-forgetfully and disinterestedly. Love is in no way dependent on the recipient's merit or worth. Love is dependent only on the lover's generosity. Love perceives 'the other' as precious and equally worthwhile, valuing self and other unconditionally. Such love regards the neighbour as loved even when enmity exists; that is, even when the other is an enemy!

That last point is most important

- what happens when you come across a situation, or a person  
where there is meanness, anger, cruelty, hatred?

There seem to be three options available:

- act the same way in return, ignore the situation, or carry on in love:  
acting the same in return would most likely inflame things, escalate the situation  
things would get worse not better
- ignoring is perhaps an improvement  
but nothing would change
- whereas acting in love opens the door to something new and better developing  
love provides the way for change, growth and new life
- Paul writes:  
*Love puts up with anything, trusts God always, always looks for the best,  
never looks back, always keeps going to the end*

In the days before the internet and mobile phones, a salesman called his wife from a coin-operated phone in a distant city. He finished the conversation, said goodbye and hung up. As he was walking away the phone rang. He went back and answered it, expecting to be informed of extra charges. But the operator said, "I thought you'd like to know – just after you hung up your wife said, 'I love you.'"

That's all a bit at arm's length, out there - let's bring it closer to home

- I'm going to read out some of 1 Corinthians 13  
I will leave a blank before each phrase, and hold up this card  
inviting you to say your own name, silently
- for example verse 4 is "Love is patient and kind"  
I'll read "[card] is patient and kind" = "[Wayne] is patient and kind"

Let's go

[card] is patient and kind  
[card] is never jealous or boastful  
[card] is never proud or selfish or rude  
[card] never demands his or her own way  
[card] is not irritable or touchy  
[card] doesn't hold grudges  
[card] doesn't notice when someone does something wrong  
[card] is never glad about injustice but rejoices when truth wins  
[card] is loyal and believes in other people  
[card] expects the best from people  
[card] keeps going to the end

These are Paul's concluding words, in *The Message* translation:

*But 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.*