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Title: The Greatest of These

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Text: [1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#)

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[Watch the service.](#)



This past Monday was Valentine's Day and while Valentine's Day is not a holy day per se, it does have its roots in the church. Long ago there was a faithful Christian named Valentinus, who was jailed for his refusal to worship the Roman Emperor. The story goes that the jailer's daughter, Julia would come and visit Valentinus and he tutored her

in both Math and faith in God. Blind since birth, Julia received a note from Valentinus on the day of his execution, February 14. The note thanked her for her kindness and was signed, Love from your Valentine. The story goes that when she received the note, Julia received the gift of sight.

Love is indeed a powerful thing. It is risky and it is sacrificial. We know how important love is. We know that it is the key to relationships. We know that it is what gives meaning to life. And we all live in the hope that our lives will be filled with love, the kind of love that comes straight from the heart of God. Yet too often we have no idea how to do it, how to live it.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the community in Corinth regarding love, to a group of people who were struggling with what it truly meant to love one another. They were struggling with the place of love in their lives. These are familiar words that we hear

"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.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 NRSV

For several years now, I can't hear these words without thinking of the movie *Wedding Crashers* starring Vince Vaughn and Owen Wilson *Wedding Crashers*. They play best friends who crash wedding parties as a lifestyle. They do so by developing elaborate cover stories to charm the crowd and become the life of the party.

In one of the early scenes, the two are at a wedding ceremony; and when the pastor announces that the bride's sister will now read scripture, Owen says to Vince, "Twenty dollars, First Corinthians." To which Vince replies, "Double or nothing, Colossians 3:12." The bride's sister takes the podium and begins, "And now a reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians

This section is such a beautiful piece of poetry. And perhaps we have heard it so much that we are forgetting what it is saying to us. We miss the dynamic qualities of love that Paul recognizes here, reminders that love is patient, it is kind, it is not arrogant, it is not rude, it bears, and believes and hopes all things. These are not mere descriptions of love, but they are dynamic and real qualities of love. It is a beautiful vision of life together.

A group of children was asked about relationships between two people, a variety of questions

What do most people do on a date? Martin, age 10 said: "People just tell each other lies. This usually gets them interested enough to go on a second date."

How do people in love typically behave: Wendy, age 8- "When a person gets kissed for the first time, they fall down and don't get up for an hour." Wendy has very high expectations

What is a surefire way to make someone fall in love? Camille, age 9 said, "Shake your hips and hope for the best."

How do you make love endure? Aaron age 8, said, "Don't forget your wife's first name."

Despite our best intentions, we struggle with love.

It's tough to preach on this type of love. I know that people here today are in various stages in that journey. People who have been celebrating many years of marriage, some who are grieving the loss of a loved one through death or divorce, some who are wondering if they will ever find true love in a true companion. We have some who are preparing to make a lifelong commitment to one another.

We live in a world that can be extremely tough. People can inflict an incredible amount of pain and hurt upon one another. When we do that, it not only causes us to weep, but God weeps with us. Sometimes, we find ourselves in a relationship that is tearing us down rather than building us up and that relationship needs to come to an end. We need relationships in our lives that affirm our value, that let us know that we are loved, that bring us a sense of wholeness. These relationships come in many ways, spouses, significant others, friendships, family. We need these relationships that remind us of how we are loved. Love is a gift, one that originates out of God's love for creation.

The people of the city of Corinth struggled with love. Paul affirms for them that the greatest spiritual gifts in his mind are faith, hope, and love- and the greatest of these is love. The ultimate sign of Christian maturity is love.

it makes you wonder how not only our relationships, but our world might look if we lived as if the greatest maturity of faith, the greatest manifestation of God in our lives was love.

Not judgment upon others.

Not our political views.

Not our violence toward one another.

Not our correct doctrine.

But what if we took seriously the word,

"And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." 1 Corinthians 13:13 NRSV

I imagine that whatever it might be that ails our lives, our relationships, our community, our nation, perhaps even our world might look a little more as God intends for it to be

There is a good reminder in the film Love Actually about this, the movie explores the different ways that love takes shape in our relationships. In the opening scene Hugh Grant's character says that whenever he is depressed, he imagines the arrival section at Heathrow Airport. Their love seems uncomplicated as people receive and embrace the ones they love. As he reflects on this, he adds, "When the planes hit the Twin Towers, as far as I know, none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge. They were all messages of love."

The people of Corinth were not much different from than people of today. Not all that different than you or I. They had all fallen prey to division and conflict, building false walls rather than true bridges. They either had forgotten or maybe didn't know how to live with love as the highest mark of their faith. They didn't know how to let love sit at the center of their lives

Perhaps the reason so many couples pick this for their wedding is not so much because they alone need to hear these words, but we all need this powerful reminder.

Love, no matter what form it takes, love requires sacrifice.

Love requires sacrifice, to lay down our egos, our own need to be right.

Everything beautiful and life-giving in this world has in one way or another been born out of love.

I realize we have been dancing around the different types of love one experiences, but at the end of the day, every form of love comes from God. Every form of love that we experience in our lives comes from and is rooted in the love of God. Love was created so that we may feel about others how God feels about all of humanity.

In essence, life is about love- We don't always understand it, the twists and turns that life takes, we don't always understand why we are called to love- We won't even always see the results of the love we give.

But life is about love.

There is no greater gift we can give others than love.- Nothing greater.

They will know we are Christians by our love.

There is no greater expression of faith in Jesus Christ than one's ability to give them to love.

No greater gift than loving others in the name of God in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen