

ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH STITTSVILLE
"LOVE IS AN ACTION" JANUARY 31, 2010
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Lord God,
May the words of my mouth,
And the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts,
Be acceptable to you, our God and our guide. AMEN

Love...

Love is patient...

Love is kind...

Are we about to have a wedding here?

What is going on?

This passage is usually used for weddings,

In fact I think it has been used for almost every wedding I have been to,

And every wedding I have officiated at as a minister.

Love is not arrogant or rude.

Love does not insist on its own way.

This is a beautiful passage mind you,

And it comes from Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

Or at least that is where we know it from.

Many scholars have speculated that Paul "borrowed" this bit about love,

From some other source.

Possibly a popular song at the time or a poem.

It is not really the same kind of language that Paul used,

And it is not made up of his most commonly used phrases.

Of course, people also did not use quotations marks back then,

Or footnotes to properly cite their sources,

So we have this passage about Love as coming from Paul.

And whether he wrote it himself, or borrowed it from another source,

He chose to include it in one of his letters to the church at Corinth

for a reason, and that reason was not

so that they would have something nice to read at weddings.

The church at Corinth was not always a happy friendly place.

We know from Paul's letters there that Corinth was a church with problems.

It was a diverse place,

Both economically and culturally.

There were people from around the world,
And from every economic group,
From the very rich to the very poor.
When they celebrated communion in the church,
It was often at a sort of pot luck supper,
And some were known to arrive early and get drunk on the wine,
Before the others had even arrived.
There were some who believed that this new Jesus religion,
With its freedom from the Jewish laws,
Meant freedom from all earthly rules and morals,
And they were doing all kinds of unimaginable things
with all kinds of different people.

When Paul was writing this letter to the people of Corinth,
Whether he borrowed a bit from a poem of the day or not,
It was to clarify what love was, and what it was not.

In our passage this morning,
We see that love is not at all about emotion and feelings.

As I mentioned earlier,
I have preached on this passage at almost every wedding I have done.
And one of the things I like to do with the couple in the sermon,
Is to take out the word love, and put in the person's name,
And see what it means to embody love for the other person.

Now this is an interesting exercise for a marriage,
But remember Paul did not write this as a wedding poem...
He wrote it for the church, the community of faith.

So let's look at this passage again,
And I will replace the word love with the names of some of our elders.

Doug is patient;
Barry is kind;
Hilary is not envious or boastful
Kim is not arrogant or rude.

Clint does not insist on his own way;
Steve is not irritable or resentful;
Charlie does not rejoice in wrongdoing,
Marlene rejoices in the truth.

Doug bears all things,
Gwen believes all things,

Ray hopes all things,
Anita endures all things.

Whether in a marriage relationship or in the community that is the church,
It is humbling to see if you are embodying love for either your spouse,
Or for your children in your family,
Or for your parents or grandparents,
or for your church family.

And of course as you read through the list of what love is,
You cannot help but notice what love is not.
In Paul's list, love is an action.
It is seen in the way people treat each other,
And not so much an emotion, how people feel about each other.
You see it is awfully difficult to try to control our feelings and our emotions,
In marriage, in family, and in the church,
But we are responsible for our actions and how we treat each other.
Are we patient and kind,
Or arrogant and rude?
Do we insist on our own way,
Or are we irritable and resentful?
Or do we hope all things, believe all things, bear all things together.

Of course this does not just apply to the elders of the church.
I encourage you to try this yourselves with this Corinthians passage,
As you think about your on relationship with those close to you,
Your spouse or partner, your children and grandchildren,
Or your parents and grandparents.
Your friends and your church family right here at St Andrew's.

What does it mean to embody love for other people?
It is a big challenge,
And it is not about how we feel, it is seen in our actions.
And then you see that when we do embody love in our actions,
Love never ends.
Even when the emotions and feelings come and go,
Even where there are times of anger and frustration,
There can still be love in the midst of it,
Because love is an action,
and love is seen in how we treat our fellow human beings,

Not just in how people feel about each other.

And now faith hope and love abide these three,

But the greatest of these is love.

Love, greater than faith.

Love, greater than hope.

Love.

Now you might be wondering why,

when I inserted the names in the place of love,

I chose the elders names.

Well I have a couple of reasons for doing that.

One reason is that they can always take me to task at the next Session meeting,

If they are upset with me.

The other reason is that we are right now in the middle of our election elders.

By next Sunday we would like to have your ballots returned to the ballot box,

At the back of the church.

I know it is difficult to choose new elders,

And I also know that it is difficult to consider the possibility

That you might be elected an elder by the congregation.

For most people it is an intimidating thought

to be considered an elder in the church.

Almost every person I have had the honour of approaching,

To be an elder in the church has been overwhelmed by the thought of it,

And has not felt as though they are worthy, or good enough.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians sets a good example of what we strive for,

In the church and also as the elders of the church,

to embody love in our words and our actions.

Believe me, in my experience, elders of the church are not perfect people,

And St. Andrew's Stittsville is no exception!

But we strive to be patient and kind.

Not to insist on our own way or to be arrogant or rude.

When things do not go our way,

We try not to be irritable or resentful.

When you are thinking about who you think

might make good elders for our church,

Think about some of these traits.

We are at an exciting time in the life of St. Andrew's.

We are a strong congregation with great gifts and potential,
In a growing community that needs to hear the good news of the God's love.
We live in a time when people's allegiance
to a particular denomination or flavour of Christianity,
is less important than the community they find in a specific church.
In moving to a new town, most people would be inclined
to attend a variety of churches,
and then choose a church based on their experience in that congregation,
rather than what particular denomination it was.

Case in point.

How many of you were born and raised in a Presbyterian Church,
whether it was this one or one elsewhere?

How many of you have regularly attended or been involved in
more than one denomination in your life?

How many of you chose to be involved in a Presbyterian church
because of our specific form of church government
and the way we make decisions with committees
in the Presbyterian Church in Canada?

I thought so.

And there is nothing wrong with that.

To me this points out that for many people, the things that separate our churches,
are nowhere as important as the things that tie us together.

Our similarities are much more important than our differences.

I think we would all say that we are followers of Jesus first and foremost.

Beyond that, some of us would say we are Presbyterian,
some would simply say that they worship in a Presbyterian Church.

There is something special about being Presbyterian though.

We are a church based on elders.

The name Presbyterian actually comes from our way of organizing the church,
and making decisions at meetings.

Presbyterian is an old Greek word presbuteros, which means elder.

We are a church that is ruled by elders,
rather than by a hierarchy of individuals.

In every congregation in the Presbyterian church,
there is a group of elders who are responsible
for making most of the decisions for the congregation.

And while the minister is a part of that group of elders,
The minister does not wield decision making power.

Did you know that the minister does not even have a vote
at the Session meetings, at the meetings of the church elders?
Unless there happens to be a tie vote among the elders,
in which case the minister is called upon to cast the deciding vote,
the minister does not even get to vote.

Your elders are chosen by you the congregation.
Their names are then considered by the Session,
and then they are approached
to see if they feel called by God to be elders of the church.
One thing that has changed for us, is that the Session has decided to institute
Term service on Session.

So when elders are elected to serve on Session now,
It will be for a term of six years rather than being for life.
Of course it will be possible to stand for election by the congregation
At the end of a six year term,
But the elder will need to be elected again to remain on Session.

In our scripture we see many of the responsibilities of the elders
in the early church,
and most of those are the same responsibilities today.

Serving on Session,
going to meetings and making decisions for the congregation
is only one job of the elders.

Each elder also has a district,
a group of people or families for whom they are responsible in the church.
It is the responsibility of the elder to keep in touch
with the people in his or her district,
and assist the minister with pastoral care.

We have just recently put up a bulletin board in the church hall,
with all the elders districts posted on it.

If you want to know who your elder is, have a look at that list.
If your name is not there, please let me know and we will update it.
We may be patient and kind, but we are not perfect... and we never claimed to be.

In the coming year, and especially as our new elders join the Session,
we are going to be talking more about pastoral visiting,
and doing some training in that area.

Pastoral visiting is often the hardest thing to do for an elder,
and sometimes for a minister as well.

You don't know if the person is going to want a visit,
or if you will be intruding on their lives.
In our hectic world it seems as though people are so busy
that when they have a free evening,
visiting with their elder may not be a high priority,
and yet that is one of the ways that we come together as a community,
that is one of the ways that we communicate our concerns to each other.
Having a good relationship with your elder when things are going well,
makes it easier to talk to them when there is a need.

We are in a special position in this congregation.
We are small enough that the minister can have personal contact with everyone
for crisis situations,
and I can be available in a way that is impossible in a larger church.
And yet it is difficult to do regular visiting in everyone's home,
despite my best intentions.
That is why our elders have districts,
And develop that special relationship with you.

As I have said,
This is an exciting time in the life of our congregation.
As we elect new elders,
As we make plans for the next few years and for the next generation.
As we develop a vision for our congregation,
And see how our facilities will help us to reach out to our community.
And in the midst of all of this,
As we embody God's love in our words and our actions,
With everyone we meet.

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, because Love is an action.