

July 27, 2014 “The Dominant Chord” Pt. 8 1st Cor. 13

This morning we turn to verse 9 in this 13th chapter of Paul’s 1st letter to the church, to the Christians located in the city of Corinth. It is a short verse. One of the things to remember as we look at verse 9 is that the subject has not changed. He is still endeavouring to show us, along with his Corinthian audience the most excellent way, of living as Christians in the world with all its problems and difficulties. Remember that the Christians of Paul’s time faced persecution on two fronts. The majority of them came out of the Jewish community, which looked for a singular Messiah. That Jewish community has officially rejected these people who recognize Jesus as that Messiah. They want the Christians to be killed. On the other hand the Roman authorities have become aware Christians are not Jews. And as a result the Empire has accepted the idea that the best answer to what it calls the Christian problem...is to eliminate them.

We in Canada do not face that specific difficulty. We face another one. We are not well understood by a culture that thinks it has passed us by. We are not taken seriously. In fact we are often not thought about at all. We are expected to be superstitious, seeking the presence of a God the balance of the culture does not believe exists. Man has become the measure of things. And therefore there is a measure of

cynicism unknown in Judea but not uncommon in the Roman Empire as a whole.

Paul's message to the Corinthians is that, better than boasting about their spiritual gifts, how holy, they have become in the service of Jesus, an attitude that created divisions in the local church, they should practice the as the chief measure of their lifestyle, and the first principle of their understanding of ethics, to love as Jesus did and as Jesus does. This chapter is a major commentary on that Biblical verse Jesus cited to the disciples, the crowds and the rich young ruler...."Love God with all your heart, your mind, your soul and strength of body, and your neighbour as though he were your very self." It is about self denial, in favour of the well being of the other, regardless of who the other is, friend, foe, or indifferent. It requires self sacrifice. It requires that we take up the cross and follow Jesus wherever He leads us, wherever God leads us, in whatever circumstance in which we find ourselves. It would take Paul to Rome. It would take Paul to martyrdom. As a matter of fact, along with thousands of other Christians, it would take each of the 12 disciples (remembering they elected someone to replace Judas), it would take each of them, with the exception of John to martyrdom. And John would die as an old man in a concentration camp on the Isle of Patmos.

The message is be loving no matter what. Be loving no matter where. Be loving to your brothers and sisters in Christ, be loving to your enemies, powerful or weak, be loving to your jailer when you are arrested, be loving to the soldiers who make life difficult, be loving to those who in the end want to kill you. And there is no question, being that loving, as a believer in Jesus, requires that you be strong. The focus is not here in yourself. The focus must always be on Jesus, and assumes that nothing happens by chance. There is no such thing as good luck. There is no such thing as bad luck. You are in the hands of the God who redeems, who loves you, and things are unfolding according to His plan, and not the plan of the Empire, the church or any part of the world. Somehow, beyond your and my ability to understand....all the pieces fit into the puzzle because the grace of God is triumphant. Christ is risen. God is risen. Hallelujah!!

Verse 9 of 1st Corinthians is like a hinge, a hinge on which the door of truth swings. “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.” There is no question even Christians begin to yawn at this point as they study the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians. What has this to do with the most excellent way of living in the service of our Lord, namely being a loving servant? The answer is precisely this. “Love never fails. (Notice that is an uncompromising statement.) Love never fails. But where there are prophecies they will cease; where there are tongues they

will be stilled; where there is knowledge it will pass away, For we know in part.”

This is humbling truth, but it is truth nonetheless. Let me paraphrase. Love never fails. The love of Jesus redeeming people from sin on the cross never fails. The love of God, and the evidence of God’s love is the unselfish love of God’s people toward others. Spirit filled, Spirit led, the love of Christians toward others never fails. You see there is going to come a time when these spiritual gifts like the ability to prophesy, to speak in tongues, to know things not learned from books or courses or any other human agency, will not be a part of the scene. We really are on a journey of faith that will conclude in heaven in the presence of God. You cannot divorce living for Jesus from the reality of eternity. And this is key in understanding what is going on...we know in part... Key to to understanding what is happening is the knowledge that we do not understand all that is happening. We understand a bit of it, a part of it. We do not understand as God does.

Jesus being crucified to save sinners: that was God’s plan. And even the closest friends of Jesus, the disciples and the women, the followers, did not understand. That is what knowing in part means. We strive to understand. We read the papers, watch the news, we spend time on the internet, we read the Bible....and the fact is we still only know

in part. We are not God. We are not Jesus. We are not the eternal Spirit of holiness. This is why the church even makes colossal mistakes. It is why church leaders sin and fall short. It is why the organization and the institution disappoint.

Ministers too! Me in particular, I know in part. All the time. My understanding is partial at best.

That is why it is so important to strive to love God with all your heart, with all you mind, with all your soul and strength. Devotion to Him alone keeps us on the road. Keeps us on track. I heard one of the best charges to the minister a few weeks ago at the ordination of David Berkers, who is now the inducted minister serving St. Andrew's Gananoque. It was delivered by the Rev. Anne Marie Jones who is shortly leaving Belleville to serve as part time minister in Meaford. She began by charging David to prioritize his love for God. Fail there she said and you will fail in everything.

That does not mean that loving God as the first priority in our lives, and our neighbours as though they were ourselves, that everything will go well, that nothing will go wrong. What it does mean is that there is a greater possibility that when the going is tough, when there are insurmountable problems, when we cannot see for the fog of our personal problems and family problems and the sheer difficulty of being a Christian in the present time....when we cannot figure out

what to do....we are more likely to pray, to read Scripture, to love as Jesus did...putting one foot in front of the other because we only know part of what is going on...no matter what we think we see. People have been predicting the demise of the church, the disintegration of the Christian fact, for 2000 years.

Why hasn't that happened? Some people have kept the faith. Some Christians have loved like Jesus. But here is the real answer. God knows and God cares and God is with His people. And if you noticed in this very short 9th verse Paul did not just say we know in part...our insight is partial. He immediately added, we prophesy in part also! The spiritual gifts that God gives us in order that we might minister with power...that is effectively...are also limited gifts. Limited by what? Limited by our humanity. Not my God's presence but by ours. Ministering in the gifts of the Spirit of God means our ministry is still limited by our human nature.

On the other hand when we love like Jesus, when love somebody who is hard to love, or whom we would much rather dismiss, somebody in the room will catch a glimpse of Jesus. What my daughter calls the God moment will happen. For someone the curtain will draw back just enough that they will be compelled to see God at work in the world. A miracle moment. A life will change. If it is true that actions speak louder than words...that is why love has to be the dominant

chord in this Christian life we seek to share. Deeds generated out of love for Jesus and other people, reveal something of God in a world where our knowledge is always partial. The dominant chord is love.

Let us pray;

Lord it is so hard to admit that we are limited. That we do not understand everything. In fact we tend to get angry when people call our opinions and especially our faith into question. Help us to love like Jesus in our everyday circumstances. Help us to recognize our limitations and love you all the more because we may cope with those limitations faithfully as we lean on you and pursue your love. Be with us and in us, that we might serve the weaker brother, the stronger sister, and the stranger whose need is something we are just barely aware of. Help us to love in your name, and where you lead us. Amen.