

July 13, 2014    “The Dominant Chord”    Pt. 6    1<sup>st</sup>  
Corinthians 13

“Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” That is the 7<sup>th</sup> verse of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13. Now the KJV says all of that in a slightly different way. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” And I am partial to the KJV only because frankly, the statements are made in a more poetic form according to my ear. The difference strangely enough in the two translations ... New International Version, our pew Bibles and the KJVersion, is largely that...a matter of how the lyric of this chapter resounds in the ear.

It has been a recurrent refrain in this series. This chapter and what it has to say about love is an action plan. It is the big answer to the big question, how shall we live. And the answer to that question according to the apostle Paul is that the kind of love Jesus showed to us and to all who he faced, puts the iron into the whole question of ethics...how we are to behave with and toward one another. And not just in this circle. He is describing how Christians ought to live. But he is laying out that pattern for Christians who are as involved in the world of their day as he was in his time. This is indeed how we are to live in the midst of the Christian movement, in the midst of the church. But it is also the way we are to live in our towns

and cities, in the midst of our own ethnic group, but also when we have the privilege to be acquainted with people of different ethnic groups and different cultures.

I mentioned early in this series that the observation was made about Christians in that first century....”O how they love one another.” I believe that observation was only made by people outside the Christian circle because those who were not Christians had tasted of that love, been treated lovingly. The early church had little if any power. It was the object of disdain and numerous powers sought to destroy it. In the crucible of a hostile world, the door opened on many occasions to a sharing of the faith through an example of silent faithfulness. It was not theology that opened doors and windows of opportunity to share what they believed. It was kindness, respectfulness, gentleness, the tools of a lifestyle that is best described as living in the love of Jesus. Often two words described Christianity...the way.

Love bears all things, says the KJV. Love protects all things, says the NIV. Those are two sides of the same coin. History can never deny that the world was not kind to the early Christians. All of the disciples of Jesus died at the hands of their persecutors. Their Jewish roots were violently opposed to their existence. The Romans and the Greco-Roman world centered in Rome, were bound and determined not to repeat the

mistake they felt they had made in the province of Judea. They regarded their experiment with tolerance of a second religion as a profound failure. Extermination of the way became policy. Death in the coliseum was high entertainment. The stories of the early Christian martyrs are the stuff of legend. But we must never forget they happened in the midst of history. Love bore the hatred, the opposition, the grief, and the pain.

But here is the profound thing about all that was negative about the centuries of persecution: the Christians were not so inward looking as to forget they were not the only ones who suffered injustice, exclusion, hatred, and rejection. In their pain they were mindful of the needs of others. Including those who did not share their faith in Jesus. They held widows as they wept at the loss of their loved ones regardless of their backgrounds. They befriended outcasts and outlaws who with them shared prison and punishment. And the witness of their love, became in many cases a means by which people crossed the line and joined the circle....not always with a clear profession of faith....but standing with people who obviously cared about them, when others did not. Love protects all things. Love protects everyone, with whom it may share a meager portion of protection. I will say it another way. The love of God in Jesus Christ, saves anyone it can from fate, from circumstance, from the system, and of course if possible...by the grace of God...from hell.

I am quoting the KJTranslation first not because it is better or best, but because it reveals a nuance of meaning in the NIV. Love believes all things. The NIV says Love always trusts. The KJV is not saying "love believes everything." Among other things that is impossible. There are too many ideas that are mutually exclusive for that to be the case. The simplest example is God exists, side by side with God does not exist. No it is not that love believes everything without discrimination. And yet there is an equation we can draw here....Love believes all things = love always trusts. Trusts what? Trusts who? It is one of the sad lessons of history that there are times when you cannot even trust the church. Sad but there have been times when that has been true. In the first of the Batman movies over the last 25 years, Jack Nicholson played the Joker. He calls out to the crowds of Gotham City....Hubba, hubba, hubba, who do you trust? We trust God. The United States of America went so far as to put that on the penny, the basic unit of currency. We trust a specific God...revealed in His Son Jesus Christ. The God who redeems. The God who saves. The God who loves sinners such as we. The God who has poured out His Holy Spirit into the midst of us. The God whom we experience. Christian love has been forged in the fires of trusting God, trusting His word in its written form. Love believes all these things and yes, trusts them. There may be other things I should add to the list. But

here is the point. It is not a long list. It is pretty short. Jesus is the center of every item on it.

Love hopes all things. Love is hopeful in all circumstances. Or as the NIV puts it...love always hopes. This statement is not about being stubborn. And it is not about closing your mind to what is really happening in the world. The Bible says the whole earth is fallen. I don't know what you think on this matter but it is the one Biblical statement that makes sense of the destructiveness of the storms that are seen in our time via television, from all parts of the world. North, south, east, west. And yet you have to ask the deeper question. How do Christians react in the face of chaos and evil. How do we live, what do we think as we live in a world gone crazy, a world turned upside down?

Living in the love of Jesus Christ, we tend to be accepting of our circumstances. We set our hopes on a new day, a new heaven and a new earth. We tend to set our hope on that time promised in the Scriptures when Jesus will come back. When all heaven and earth will bow the knee in recognition of His sovereignty. Not because we are intellectually convinced...although that will happen too...but because it will be undeniable that He is King of King and Lord of Lords. The whole of creation will recognize Him. And people will experience a safety hitherto unknown to our kind. O in the

night, O in the night, (the time of the darkness) my hope lives on. If you noticed...and in case you didn't I am pointing it out, there was only one time in that song that the line appeared, My hope was gone. When Jesus died on the cross, in that interval of time before the 3<sup>rd</sup> day and the resurrection. As long as God is here, Jesus is with us, the Holy Spirit confirms that truth to us...my hope lives on. The love of God produces in us hope that does not run out.

The verse says love endures all things. Love always perseveres. This is not about an imaginary world, or fantasy life. There is pain. We suffer. I have not gotten over the loss of folk from this church who passed over during the last 3 and a half years. Tears and heartache remind me that my grief is fresh, like we lost them this morning or just last night. I haven't gotten over the losses that occurred between the time I was pulpit supply here...and my actually becoming the minister at St. Andrew's. But there is a strength and a power to this love which Jesus gives us to share with another that allows us to shoulder our burdens and take the next step, and the next, and the next. Which is just another way of saying through faith in Jesus, we have stock in eternity, what will be by God's grace beyond life on earth and in time. We endure sickness and increasing years and loss....because the love is that strong. Because the love of Christ in the fellowship of this family, is the truly dominant chord.

Let us pray...

Lord, our God, for the experience of your saving love we give thanks. For the power of the love we experience with brothers and sisters we praise your name. For the church's ability to be that reservoir of love that sustains through your Spirit, thank you. Help us Lord to refuse to store it all in the tank. Help us to resist the temptation to keep your love to ourselves. Make us burst with it when we are out and around, that people might see it, feel it and taste it and want it as much as we do. Help us to be clear eyed about loving you and our neighbours as ourselves. Amen.