

August 3, 2014 “The Dominant Chord” Pt. 10 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 13

We call it the love chapter, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13. And yet it has become fairly obvious that other things are being addressed in this chapter besides the simple message about love. In Paul’s principle goal of showing us the most excellent way of serving our Lord and Saviour, he has underlined the importance of spiritual gifts, while at the same time putting them in their place. In fact he will begin chapter 14 with this statement...”follow the way of love and eagerly desires spiritual gifts.” The gifts are for ministry to one another and the world that surrounds us, starting with the neighbours on our own streets. Love, sacrificial love, as St. Francis put it, imitating Jesus, provides the balance so that gifts do not become a reason to boast, or a bone of contention.

Every major mistake made by the Christian Church, as an organization, has been the result of forgetting or losing sight of the fact that the church exists for others. Being a Christian means serving God by first and foremost serving others. Putting their needs first, before our own, and certainly before any motives attached to ambition. If as the Scriptures clearly proclaim, Jesus became a servant, we have no right and no reason to try and be anything less, servants to one another, servants to those we meet outside these walls and rooms and doors.

And Paul has reminded us that this world is not the ultimate goal of our existence. Things even as precious as prophecy and other spiritual gifts will pass away. He has reminded us in the 9<sup>th</sup> verse that what we see when we look around us, we do not fully understand at the best of times. Our insight is limited. We see in part. I am continually reminded of the words the script writer placed in the mouth of a young Clint Eastwood, playing a hardnosed detective, who toted a .357 magnum...at the time the most powerful handgun in the world. Harry Calaghan says, "A man's gotta know his limitations." Our best work Paul says in this chapter is a limited success....because we do not understand fully the plan of God or the full significance of the factors we "think" we understand. We know in part and we prophesy in part. Even when using our Holy Spirit given gifts, following what we believe to be the Lord's leading and guiding, we are doing a partial work, with an outcome limited by our humanity and our sinful nature. We cannot undo or pass around the facts that we are laboring in and part of a fallen creation, a fallen world, and a fallen church.

Which means, if we think our brand of Christianity is the best there is, it is a matter of time before our denomination, its programmes and personel disappoint us. And in the midst of this treatise on the love ethic we are to pursue he turns to the fact of another time. "But when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." Paul is

reminding us lest we forget, that this world is not our home. In the words of that old spiritual, “we are passing through.” It may be hard to believe, it may be hard to accept, but Jesus is going to come back to this earth even as He left it. He will come as God to His own. He will be perfect in every way that we are not. And everything will change. Not some things, all things! As John wrote in his document entitled The Revelation...old things will pass away, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. No tears. Genuine consolation for all the things that have happened that have hurt us.

“But when perfection comes” ...when Jesus comes again. There are several things that must be said about the second coming. But this is the first. And it will always be the first as we watch the clock and tap our toes with a touch of impatience that it seems to be taking too long...according to our partial understanding. This is the first thing to be said about the return of Jesus to the world and His own. It is not a matter of if, it is and it will always be a matter of when. Paul has told the Corinthian believers, and by the grace of God in the raising up of these writings in the form of what we moderns call the Bible, he is telling us...no matter how much time it takes, or how impatient we become, or how disillusioned we are that God would permit time to continue to unfold with its modern tragedies, the heinous nature of sin in our time, it has never been in doubt. Jesus will return. The hour will be the right

hour. The day will be the right day. It will be the right month. It will be the right year. Jesus is coming again.

In the MCB we have the chorus by the black composer, writer of Gospel songs, "Soon and Very Soon".....We are going to see the King. Hallelujah, we are goin' to the see the King. And things are going to change. No more cryin' there. Which means the things that hurt us, that wound us, that wreck our plans will not be happening. If there are tears, and I am sure there will be...they will be tears of joy. Some of us will be gasping for breath because we almost gave up hope...I said almost...that it could be so good, so wonderful, so beautiful.

Things are going to change. No more dyin' there. Think of the magnitude of that change. Where life whatever it involves, will not involve coming to an end. The reunions that will be a part of the fact that death will have no place. Arthritis will not be a part of the scene or the experience. Pain free. No more eye drops for those of us who have glaucoma.

I said the first thing we have to say about the second coming is that it is for certain. And the second thing we must realize about the return of our Lord and Redeemer is that it in no way can be controlled or manipulated by human beings. I want to make this as plain as I can. There is nothing we can do to hasten that hour. There are those in the ultra right wing of the church who think that by aiding in the rebuilding of the

Temple in Jerusalem they will hasten Christ's return. That is one of the shortest sighted insights I have ever read about. God being God is not going to be manipulated by the plans, the wisdom or the creativity of people. Not even the plans, the wisdom or the creativity of people whose attempts are based on faith in Jesus. Nuclear holocaust, will not hasten the second coming of Jesus. It is not in our control. Period. And in fact if some Christians think they can make God change the timetable...they don't even understand the audacity of their sinfulness. Jesus will return at the right hour, at the right time. The perfect time. And that means God's time, and not yours or mine.

In the 1980's one of my favourite movies, I have lots of favourites by the way, was called "Romancing the Stone." It is a love story that swirls around the search for a hidden treasure. A very large emerald. Danny Devito plays one of two brothers, bad guys. As the authorities close in on him, his brother motors away to safety. Danny's character hollers "Come back!" His brother replies, "Soon!" And Danny responds, "How soon?" When the perfect One comes, it will be in the perfect moment. And to all who are alive to witness it, it will suddenly be so obvious, it is the perfect moment.

The first Christian Creed, the first recognized confession of faith, consisted of 4 words. Jesus Christ is Lord.

Which means only He is Lord. Means we are not going to figure out the dawning of the end time before it arrives. It means the God of the Bible Father-Son-Holy Spirit is really God. And it means we are going to have to function to the very last on the basis of faith. You and I will never know a moment when the real challenge for us, will not be the challenge to live as believers. And the greatest challenge we will face in living, will be how to live with each other, whether or not to love. You know what God wants of us, what Jesus wants of us, what the Holy Spirit wants of us.

In this mean time...this in between time...between the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and His returning to us and for us....love is to be the dominant chord in the scoring of our lives and relationships. And I think that is the one detail, which when He comes, is not going to change.

Let us pray;

Lord challenge us to love people who are easy to love. Challenge us to be loving in those moments when we would sooner lose our tempers, and give over to harsh words that can hurt. Empower us to love when we are tempted to impatience. When we are tempted to be someone else's judge. Strengthen our faith for the time that remains to us. Strengthen our faith that we might remember those precious

words, “Love the Lord with all your heart and mind and soul and strength, and your neighbour (whoever he or she might be) as yourself. Show us that the way of the cross, is the way of Love. Jesus way. Amen.