

July 6, 2014 “The Dominant Chord” Pt. 5 1 Corinthians 13

1st Corinthians 13 verse 6: “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.” The very first thing we need to remember as we consider this verse is that the apostle Paul is not making a general statement here. It is not a general statement about love. It is a highly specific statement. There are numbers of words in the Greek language, the original language of the New Testament documents for the word love in English. And the apostle Paul is not talking about any of them, except the one he has personally invented. Agapn...Christian love. Christ like love. Self- sacrificing,- thinking of the other person first-love. Love that is best understood as one stands in the shadow of the cross on Calvary. Good Friday love. Love that redeems. Love that is the chief characteristic of the fact that we believe in Jesus and want more than anything else to serve Him in our daily lives, which means we have to seek the very best for the people, individually and in groups that we meet as we make the journey of faith in real life, in the real world.

That is the love that does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. I have been at pains to say it is the primary statement about Christian ethics. It gives us the clearest picture of what the Christian lifestyle should look like. And that is why Paul could say, that in this chapter of his first

correspondence with the church in Corinth, he would show them the most excellent way. He calls it the more excellent way than for instance being a person who has outstanding spiritual gifts, the kind of gifts you might look for in a new minister, or that you might praise in an old minister. He calls it the more excellent way than the kind of faith that is followed by the miracles of God. Think about that. Loving in this fashion that he describes is a more excellent way in terms of being characteristic of belief in Jesus than being able to heal the sick, or pray with such God honoured devotion that prayers get answered.

On my short list of favourite films is the movie Avatar. It is not a story about the church or Christian values and yet there are moments when my soul responds to lines of dialogue in that film. We are on another planet 6 years of space travel away from Earth. The natives are blue skinned. No question they are humanoid in form. But they also have long tails. When the heroine who is one of the natives, takes the hero is an earthling in an Avatar, a body that looks like the native folk, she takes him to the most sacred place in her people's lives. She describes it as a place "where prayers are made and sometimes heard"sounds like church. Sound like being in the presence of the person and the power of God. Paul says for Christians who believe....who court such experiences,

there is a more excellent way. Loving others, the way Jesus loves us all, as a lifestyle.

And Paul is not just babbling in Christianese. He is not just doing the religious talk that comes easily to our minds and lips. You have to remember who Paul is and was. He was a priest of Israel! One who loved the Old Testament with its rules about how to live as a child of God. He was filled with an almost perfect hatred for anyone and every one who was not interested in living up to what he understood was the perfect standard, the sinless standard. He loved the Law, and devoted himself to it to the point that he could justify organizing a posse and going out in pursuit of Christians with the single goal being to give them a quick trial, find them guilty and kill them. And that was pretty easy to do because if you asked Christians if they believed in Jesus they would usually tell the truth. They would say yes I do! Guilty...No one should be the object of our faith but God! Kill them!

That's what Paul was doing when the risen and ascended Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus. To his genuine and utter amazement, Paul did not have to be told who it was who spoke to him in the darkness of his sudden blindness. He was hunting Christians. He said, "who are you?" But he knew. When the voice said, "I am the one you are persecuting," Paul knew it was not the voice of one of the 12

disciples, or some local Christian leader. He knew it was Jesus. That's why he did not simply ask who are you. His question was, "Who are you Lord." Paul understood how dramatically Jesus changes lives. Paul carried warrants to arrest Christians. He wanted them dead. Not imprisoned. Not forced to live elsewhere. He wanted them dead. Everything changed on the road to Damascus. Which means Paul understood the importance of a powerful encounter with God in Jesus Christ.

The fact is this statement is not an intellectual concept. It is a statement from the heart of a man converted to faith in Jesus by an encounter with the risen Lord. Love is not happy with evil. He is not talking about a potential audience in Corinth; he is talking about himself. God is not happy with evil. In his desire to wipe out the Christians. To seize them and kill them. To make their blood run in the streets of Jerusalem because of his zeal for God, he realized on the road to Damascus, he was not serving God...he was serving the Lord of the flies. Beelzebub. Satan. The Prince of Darkness. The one who tempts us to live sinfully.

The Book of Acts describes how Paul's physical blindness was healed by Ananias. If you want to read that episode it is in Acts 9. But even before that miracle occurred, the scales peeled off Saul's mind. He saw what he had been doing. Pursuing righteousness by doing that which the

commandments of God forbid. Serving evil, in the attempt to do something good in God's name. Paul the mature Christian, the gospel preacher, the cross cultural evangelist so responsible for the gentile harvest of lives into the Christian fold, says it plainly here as he describes his experience. Love that is the likeness of the love of Jesus....does not delight in evil. He had been delighting in evil. Delighting in the exercise of the power to take lives. Godly love does not do that. In fact Godly love refuses to compromise on the matter of doing that which is evil, devilish, akin to darkness.

And again here is the link with the cross. Jesus made choices. Those choices took Him as surely as His Father's will did, to Calvary. Perhaps some of you will remember the series it was pre Easter a couple of years back....well maybe you won't remember. I remember I focused our preaching time on the verse in which Jesus said, "We are going to Jerusalem." Peter sought to persuade Jesus not to do that. And all the disciples affirmed the wisdom of Peter's insight. It was dangerous to go there. They had enemies in Jerusalem. Powerful enemies. And what did Thomas say? "We might as well all go and die with Him."

During our week in Brampton, holiday time, two weeks ago, we attended the strawberry social at St. Andrew's Brampton. Rebekah and I always sing in the Variety Show that

is part of that evening. I am always really nervous, because Rebekah always insists that we do a couple of songs we both know well. But she also always insists we sing something I have never even heard before. And we usually only have an hour or two to practice. I lose my temper. She loses hers. She's my daughter...I give in. This year it was a song called "In The Night". Marvelous song. When she is here with us on her holidays we will sing it for you. She has already decreed that. It contains the line..."No they did not take His life...He laid it down." No compromise with evil. Love is uncompromising in that regard. The love of God insists on saving lives. That's what saving souls means! "O in the night, O in the night, my hope lives on."

"Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth." That's Paul's testimony. When he met Jesus, just that fast, in the time it takes to blink an eye, his life changed. And not just his life, his mind. And not just his mind, his heart. The bloodlust was gone. He recognized Jesus is Lord and that means God Almighty. El Shadai! And his heart changed in recognition of the truth about Jesus. Instead of wanting to judge men and women and children to death, he wanted to love them to life. With his life. The power of God's Spirit opening the window of opportunity and blessing his feeble attempts to be like His Lord in this matter of love.

Paul taught people. He wanted them to know the truth. But he wanted them to taste the love of Christ as even he had been privileged to do. He recognized that in this matter of touching the lives of others....love is the dominant chord.

Let us pray;

Lord none of us is perfect. We make a mistake when we think we have gotten it all right. You opened Paul's eyes to the truth. That's how he met You. That's how he came to pursue the desire to love people as you love them, as you love us! Lord in the week that is even now beginning we will try to be more loving. Fill us with joy when we manage to love like Jesus. When we fail, fill us with greater determination to be instruments of yours, that we might reach for the notes, but that your Spirit would play the tune, that we and those in whose midst you have set us might hear the gospel's dominant chord. Help us to live to your glory. Amen