**Jesus Is Love**

**First Baptist Church, Albemarle**

**January 31, 2016**

For the past several weeks we have been looking deeper into the person of Jesus. In the first sermon of the series, we looked at the name of Jesus who is our Redeemer and Messiah and how we carry his name into the world. The second sermon in the series looked at his first miraculous act of turning water into wine. This first act of transformation was a foreshadowing of Jesus transforming the heart of humanity. Last week’s sermon looked at the Good News Jesus brought into the world for those who were brokenhearted, bound in sin and blind by shortsightedness. The Good News Jesus preached was for everyone because we are all poor in Spirit. Today, we will look a little deeper into how Jesus is love as described by Paul in this well know passage of scripture.

1 Corinthians 13 is often misinterpreted in the church. It is a passage often used in the context of a wedding ceremony. We read the passage as if Paul was officiating a wedding in Corinth between a blissful couple who are committing their lives to one another. This is not the context. Although this passage does define how we are to love, it is not set in the context of a marriage relationship. Paul sent the first letter to the church in Corinth because they were in constant conflict. They were divided in whom they were going to follow. Some wanted to follow Apollos, others wanted to follow Paul. Some in the church were practicing sexual immorality out in the open, even viewing it as a source of pride. People within the church fellowship were taking one another to court because they could not talk out their differences. Some were still participating in idolatry by sacrificing food to other gods and then eating the food after the sacrifice. In addition, they were fighting about who should participate in the Lord’s Supper and who should not. Conflict existed everywhere!

Then in chapter 12, Paul addressed the issue of spiritual gifts. Within the church there was a competition of who had which gift and which gift was greater than others in the sight of God. The Corinthians believed that a hierarchy existed within the church, beginning with apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, leaders, and tongue-speakers in that order. After debunking this idea that a hierarchy existed among the gifts, Paul preached about the Body of Christ being one body with many parts. Every gift and every person has a role to play within the church. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to develop their gifts as given by the Spirit and work in concert with one another.

With that in mind, that leads us into chapter 13. Paul's overall position is unmistakable. Whoever lacks love, no matter how many gifts or the type of spiritual gifts received, is "a noisy gong," "clanging cymbal" or absolutely "nothing" at all. If you do not act in love, you are nothing but a nuisance to the body. Anyone who acts without love does more harm to the church than good.

From Paul’s perspective, love isn't about any specific act. Love is not necessarily busy or an outcome-driven endeavor. One commentator wrote, “On the contrary, Paul sees love as a vibrant tapestry reflecting an array of wonderful hues that flow from God's Spirit, transforming and ultimately mending broken human relationships.” Love is about relationships. Love is characterized by patience, kindness, humility and considers the needs of others before self. It is not jealous, envious, proud, easily angered or bitter. Love weeps over evil and celebrates goodness. "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (v. 4-8a)

Paul then tells the Corinthians to grow up! Don’t think you know everything. You only know just a tiny portion of what it means to love and to follow Jesus. When you look in the mirror, you only see a poor reflection of Jesus. It will only be when we come face-to-face with God in heaven that all things will finally be revealed to us. Until then, we live by faith in what we have not seen, put our hope in God’s promises and we exercise love in all things because that is the way of Jesus.

Everything Jesus did while on earth was filled with love. He is the personification of love as described by Paul to the Corinthians. 1 John 4:19 says that “we love because he first loved us.” Jesus showed us how to love through his life, death and resurrection. Jesus spoke love with his words; he showed love by taking our sins upon himself on the cross; he proved that God is love through his resurrection. Who is this man? Jesus is love.

So if Jesus is love and we are to like Jesus, then we need to increase in love. So how do we grow in love? We first come to understand that love is indispensable. God’s love is absolutely necessary in our lives because it is the highest form of love. God so loved us that he sacrificed his own Son in order for us to have life. Without this indispensable love, we are nothing. God’s love should drive us to worship because of what he has done in our lives. God’s love should push us to know more about him because we want to emulate Jesus. God’s love should give us the desire to sacrifice for the sake of others and put other’s needs before our own because that is what Jesus did for us. That is how love changes us as followers of Jesus!

Second, we mature in love when love becomes unmistakable in our lives. We cannot become more patient without loving more. We cannot be kind without loving others. We do not envy less, stop boasting, or lose our pride without learning to love more. Love keeps us from being rude, being self-seeking, being easily angered, from keeping a record of wrongs. Love helps us to stay away from evil and helps us to seek the truth. Love protects us from ourselves. Love helps us to trust in the One who loves us without end. Love will always win out in the end. *Agape Love* is hard to define but when we see it in action, it is unmistakable! We know it is of God and from God!

Finally, we grow in love because love endures all things. Love never fails! Even when we fail miserably, we know that God’s love endures. If God is love, then God cannot not show love. Love is who he is. So if God, Jesus and Holy Spirit existed before time, love will endure well beyond time as we know it. Love knows no end and God’s love for his creation does not know an end. That is why Paul tells us that out of faith, hope and love, the greatest of these is love.

So what do we do with love that is indispensable, unmistakable and enduring? We simply accept it. There is nothing we can do to earn this kind of love. There is no amount of money in the world that can buy this love. There is no amount of good works that would make us deserving of this type of love. We just say “yes” to Jesus. We say “yes” to his life, death and resurrection. We say “yes” to the gift of salvation. We say “yes” to the body of Christ and “yes” to the abundant life Jesus offers. It doesn’t compute but that doesn’t make it any less true. We place our faith in what is unseen, hope in what Jesus promised and believe that love covers all things because He is love! Thanks be to God!