

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Frederick Buechner American writer, novelist, poet, autobiographer, essayist, preacher, and theologian writes that love is not only an emotion but an act of will. All too often we focus ourselves on how we feel about someone or something. We spend so much effort in trying to express and convince others to feel the way we do, only to lose sight of what is really before us. As we move to the completion of our series on Sharing God's Love, the Apostle Paul is imploring us to move beyond what we feel into action.

Love is risky. Love is vulnerable. Love is hard. Love compels us to move beyond where we are comfortable. The Greeks have 8 words for love – you may even know some of them, eros, philia, agape, storge (familiar love) – protective, mania (obsessive love), ludus (playful love), pragma (enduring love), philautia (self love) - in order to care for others, we must first learn to care for ourselves. The Greek word for love in this passage is agape – “the love which is unconditional, bigger than ourselves, a boundless compassion and an infinite empathy that you extended to everyone, whether they are family members or distant strangers.” But the love that Jesus calls us to, the love that Paul is pointing to is not just the idea of agape love. It is an all encompassing love that includes all the dimensions of love.

We know the desire for connection and community – especially in this time of physical distancing. We long to be with each other as we used to and mark time together through simple acts of breaking bread.

Love bears all things. Being in relationships with other people is hard. Whether it is with a spouse, parent, child, sibling, neighbor because we are all imperfect humans, relationships have ups and downs. We all want love that is there for us when life is difficult and yet we do not always want to be the one bearing the load. We want to be supported and not always doing the supporting. But love that bears is not just support. The Greek word here is *stegai* means to cover closely, protect, roof. It only appears 4 times in the New Testament, twice in 1st Corinthians and twice in 1st Thessalonians. Protect stirs up deep emotions within us. There is not one among us who if someone needed protection we would not jump up to do it. And yet we know that protect does not always mean removing all danger. As adults around children we know that we cannot watch their every move. We know that we need to move harm away but also teach them what to do. We place knives up out of the reach of the youngest children but also know that we need to teach children how to safely use knives – it is an essential skill. So how do we shelter as well as teach in love?

Love believes all things. We tend to have an all or nothing approach to belief. Some of us choose not to trust people until they've proven themselves to be worthy of trust. Some of us trust until people have proven not to be trustworthy. And while it is easiest to think of believing all things as individuals it is an important reminder that Paul is speaking to the church – it is not only about individuals being believed in but as a community. As our children grow we've learned a phrase – assume best intentions, parents are not always trying to make lives difficult and vice versa.

Love hopes all things. In a popular Peanuts cartoon, Charlie Brown admonishes Lucy with the words, “Lucy, you must be more loving. This world really needs love. You have to let yourself love to make this world a better place.” To which Lucy responds, “Look, Blockhead, the world I love. It’s people I can’t stand!” Charlie Brown wants more – for himself and for Lucy, he has hope that together the world can become a better place. If you know anything of the world in Peanuts you know that Lucy is the only who tricks Charlie Brown in kicking the football only to move it. Charlie Brown never gives up believing in her potential, even when he has reason to but instead has hope of their potential to change the world together. Hope is contagious. We see it in the heartwarming stories of Olympians who beat impossible odds just to be there. Hope lifts us to places where we can be inspired to do things we may not think are possible.

Love endures all things. All too often we think of endurance as a feat of strength – running a marathon and yet even marathon runners will tell you that it is not planning for the 26 miles but putting your next step down. Endurance is showing up every day and trying. Quick point - enduring love is not abusive love. Enduring love is putting in the work to get to the next step. We can do hard things. I have to remind myself of this on a regular basis. Imagine for a minute about the witness of the church, if the people at Corinth had not kept trying, kept struggling at what it meant to be the church?

Bearing, believing, hoping and enduring in all things with the depth of love that God has given us is transformative. As a student in Confirmation class I had all the book answers but struggled with application. During our retreat we were being asked to put our learning

into action. Through a game we were confronted with trials and I will never forget when the Christ character stood between our group and the obstacle before us, reached out his arms and embraced it. For our benefit we were given the opportunity to experience the depth of love Christ had for us in his outstretched arms on the cross so that we might have life and life abundant. Having love in all things is what God has done, modeled and called us to do in return. “I have decided to stick to love;” the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, for “hate is too great a burden to bear.” May all things we do be done in love. meet. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.