

We continue to work our way through Paul's passage on love. Each week when we come back to it I find more and more. How is that even possible with a passage we've heard so often. The short answer is God. The long answer is this sermon. As United Methodists we believe that holy scripture is the inspired word of God. That means that we believe the Holy Spirit was present in the forming of the text in the ancient days AND that the Holy Spirit is present with us in the reading of the text. You may have heard the joke of a young priest on vacation goes to the Vatican and wanted to study the original texts of scripture. Having studied Greek and Hebrew, he is pouring over the manuscript in the quiet library when all of a sudden you hear echoing through the walls, it says celebrate – not celibate. It's a reminder that while scripture is truly God's word, that it has human fingerprints all over it and sometimes we make mistakes.

Quick review – we began examining Paul's first definition of love as patient and kind. This requires us to slow down, breathe and let God work in and through us. The second definition is listing all the ways that love is not. Too often we are “speaking the truth in love” when really we are not loving at all. We looked at the ways that we say one thing and do another and in most instances we are making relationships with each other harder. This week we hear Paul talking about how we celebrate, rejoice when we are filled with love. Remember that as Paul is making his way through this letter to the church in Corinth – things are not going well. It is especially important because all too often we hear this passage in the context of weddings where couples are just starting out and everything is beautiful and easy. But Paul is writing to a church in conflict, in deep hurt – more like counseling a couple on the brink of divorce. How much more powerful

are the words that love “does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth.”

We’ve all watched train wrecks have we not? Not actual train wrecks but we’ve watch relationships, adventures, plans that seem doomed from the start. We sometimes even reach out and try to warn those involved to be careful. We can all think of examples in our lives when we were on the giving and receiving end of the phrase, “I told you so!” Think for a moment when you were the one saying, “I told you so.” Did you feel strengthened, vindicated, justified? We say, we are rejoicing in the truth!

Now think of a time when you were on the receiving end of “I told you so.” Did you feel dejected, hurt, frustrated or angry? The last thing we want to deal with is someone saying I told you so when things are already not working out. We want to point out the Bible says, we are not supposed to rejoice in wrong doing but nothing feels like it will get through to the one gloating!

What exactly is the Apostle Paul lifting up that love is to do? To love. Love does not require us to categorize it. Love is an action and not a noun. As Paul defined love in the positive and the negative, he was focusing on the acts of love. Love that calls us to slow down and be kind. Love that calls us to lift up and rejoice. Love does not call us to keep score but does call us to keep moving, keep practicing, to keep going and to never stop.

In just a few weeks we will mark a year of living in this pandemic. Many, if not all of us, are waiting until things can go back to normal. That has me thinking of the church at Corinth. Perhaps the reason they needed the reminder of what love is and love is not was because they were tired. It

was hard to be the church then. It was illegal until Constantine converted in 312 to be followers of Jesus Christ, which did not happen for 250 years after the writing of this letter. Everyone in the church were new to faith and they could not look around for examples of how to do it. Paul founded the church in Corinth during his second mission trip which happened between 53-57 AD. Paul stayed with the community for 18 months before continuing on. A new church, faith in Jesus, all gatherings & actions illegal and the one who taught them had moved on. Putting ourselves in their shoes, we may understand why they are having such a hard time. If storms & pandemics have taught us anything, we know when we get tired, when we are weary, it becomes harder to do things. And yet, we've also learned how important it is to mark the good things. Paul's reminder that love rejoices is a good word for us all.

What are the ways in which we celebrate or rejoice now? What are the ways we build each other up when things are tough? We can call each other to check in. We can drop care packages off on door steps. We can mail letters. We can learn new things, like video calls, bread baking & projects. We can write down recipes for things that are in our minds. We can plan for the future. We can pray for direction. We can sing boldly in our homes and cars. This next week, find small ways to celebrate each other so we can cultivate a sense of joy.

As we continue to grow in the knowledge and love of God, may we resist the urge to say I told you so, and instead find ways to celebrate & rejoice in love. May we give thanks, with grateful hearts for the love God has given us and in turn share that love with all we meet. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.