



ONE VOICE



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From the Pastor's Desk

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Loved does not insist on its own way; love is not irritable or resentful; love does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things."

1 Corinthians 13:4-7



When the month of February comes around, being a Pastor, I am usually thinking of Lent. The season of Lent marks forty days, minus Sundays, upon which we reflect on the suffering of our Lord Jesus, leading up to the victorious celebration of Easter Morning.

But this year, Lent does not begin until March, yet our focus is still on love as we celebrate Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day is a celebration of love. Mostly the focus of celebration of love is upon the love between a husband and a wife. There are lots of Valentine cards to choose from, some with beautiful images and poetry expressing the love of the heart for the other. There are really mushy cards, of which some are appreciated. There are some funny cards that create a laugh, which is just as much appreciated. Of course, some type of flowers, usually some roses or a favorite flower is given as a gift, along with a special meal at a restaurant is chosen for the delightful meal; plus the lack of cooking and cleaning up afterwards as an added gift. Valentine's Day is also celebrated by those who are dating, celebrating the other as a special person in their life; perhaps celebrating a friendship with a budding love for the other. It is a time of celebrating love and the beloved.

Often the Valentine's Day cards lift up the ideal love between husbands and wives or between significant others. The ideal love exists some times. Sometimes the ideal love exists for several days in a row. Sometimes the ideal love exists for several weeks, or sometimes the ideal love exists for part of a day. We love our spouses. We love our parents. We love our children. We love our good friends. Yet, even for the ones who have said vows of love to each other, promising to love the other above everyone else in the world, promising to be faithful, to be honest, to listen and to respond to each other and to encourage one another, there are times we just fall short of loving the other in such a manner. After all, we are all sinners. Since we are sinners, it is our natural tendency to put ourselves first. So when we are tired, we can become irritable. We can become resentful, when after a long day, an errand is asked of us by the other. When there is a disagreement, we rejoice in proving the other wrong, when you were right. Some of us even have a little victory dance for the occasion, which of course doesn't sit well with the other.

Apostle Paul wrote, what I think is the best definition of love ever written, in his first letter to the congregation in Corinth. Corinth was a troubled congregation. Corinth was a major port city, which meant there were people from all over the Roman Empire, different cultures with different religions. When Christianity came to them, they still had to deal with some of their cultural differences. One of the problems

Apostle Paul addressed were some jealousy issues about who was a real Christian, as some had the gifts of speaking in tongues and others did not. So Apostle Paul taught that each person has received a gift from the Holy Spirit. Each gift is different. Then he compared it to the body, saying the body has different parts, like ears for hearing, eyes for seeing, fingers and toes, yet each part is part of the body and needed. Then he talked about the best gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of love. Then Paul describes this gift of love. *"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful; love does not rejoice in the wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things."*

This kind of love is what we all need, what we all desire. This love is a gift of God's unconditional love. At times and for awhile, our hearts are capable of being patient and kind and refraining from being arrogant or rude. But as I mentioned, we are all sinners and as sinners, we are incapable of loving another perfectly all the time. We need this gift of love. The good news is that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit freely give each of us the gift of their unconditional love. The Lord is patient and kind with us. The Lord



is not arrogant or rude or become resentful. The Lord is always present to love us, even when we have become impatient, rude, arrogant, and unkind or worse. Nobody likes to be treated with arrogance, impatience or rudeness or in an unkind matter or rubbing our noses in the fact we were wrong. The Lord doesn't like being treated in such a manner either. Our Lord, however loves you and me with an unconditional love. The Lord loves you and me with a love that bears all things, all our sinful actions. The Lord's love for you endures all rebellious deeds. Our Lord always seeks us out with his love and grace and mercy. The Lord seeks to bring about reconciliation through his mercy and forgiveness. Then our Lord lift us up in love, which claims us as his beloved.

What is even more amazing is that the Holy Spirit gifts us with God's unconditional love. The Holy Spirit gifts us with God's love that is patient and kind. The Holy Spirit gifts us with a love the bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. The Holy Spirit gifts us with this love to empower us to love our spouses, to love our parents, to love our children, to love our friends, to love our neighbors and even to love our enemies with a love that is patient and kind, rejoicing in the right. So let's celebrate Valentine's Day and every day with the gift of God's unconditional love.

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen." Matthew 22:1-14

When we read this story, where does our attention gravitate to? - to last paragraph - to those who are rejected – **"Many are called, but few are chosen."** As our minds dwell on that, we miss a couple of important details/points of this story.

- Everyone was invited.
- The party was going to take place.
- And most of those who weren't there, weren't there because they refused the invitation, they made excuses.

The writer Drew Duke recalled from her childhood her second grade Valentine's Day party. Several days earlier a big decorated box had been placed at the front of the room by the teacher. It had a slit in the top. Each student had been invited to bring valentines addressed to friends and to drop them into the box. Then on Valentine's Day, one student was designated by the teacher as the postman to distribute the cards. Earlier that week Drew's mother had bought a package of 35 valentine cards. Drew asked her, "Why

did you buy so many?" She replied, "So you can give one to each person in your class." "No ma'am," Drew said, "We don't do it that way. We only give cards to our special friends. I only need four cards. I don't even like some of the people in my class." Her mother said nothing else. Drew signed four cards and put the names on the front.

Everybody was excited when the Valentine's Party began. The girl designated as postman began calling the names and handing out the cards. Some very popular children got bunches of cards. Drew heard her name called quite often and was having a wonderful time. But then she became aware that the little girl sitting in front of her had received no cards. Her head was drooping lower and lower. Then suddenly the postman called this little girl's name and delivered to her one valentine. Her face lit up like morning sunshine. She tore open that valentine, hurrying to see who had cared enough to send it. Drew looked over her shoulder and saw that it was signed "Your secret admirer." The little girl smiled and glanced around the room, wondering who it could be. "But", said Drew, "I knew who it was but I didn't tell. I recognized my mother's handwriting." Her mother had obtained a class roster and had sent a card to every child in the class. Drew learned from her mother what her mother learned from God: that God's love reaches out to all, even the unlovely. Everybody is invited to God's party!

This story reminds me of another story - the story of the prodigal sons, or maybe better titled "The Loving Father." The son returns and dad throws a party. The undeserving son's return is celebrated. Everyone is invited and having a great time...but the elder son. The father goes out to this son and begs him to come and join the festivities – begs him to put on his party robe and celebrate. The party was taking place, he was invited, in fact – he was the official host – but the choice to come, to celebrate, to be part of the event – well, we don't know what he chose. We know only by what we might choose.

But here are the facts we know: The party is going to take place, we are invited, the choice is - are we going to come in and be part of it, or not?

Welcome to the kingdom of God!

Wanderings and Wonderings, Pastor Bill Peters



