

Holding on to Love
I Corinthians 14:3-8a and Philippians 2:1-4
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
November 22, 2020
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

So, today we heard readings from two different letters written by Paul to churches he was in relationship with. One was written to the church at Corinth, one to the church at Philippi. One was written to a congregation who was having some conflict with Paul himself, the other to a congregation with whom Paul had a secure and loving relationship. One was written to a congregation that was having conflicts within the church community, the other to a congregation who was feeling opposition from the community around the church.

So, these were different circumstances and yet there is so much in common in the messages that we read today. After all in both messages love is central. In both messages the way love works best is when there is humility involved, when parties are willing to see not only their own way but to understand the perspective of others and to do what is good for others.

And this is not easy. Whether we are talking about personal relationships or within communities of connection or in relationship to strangers, especially those who differ from us...these practices are not easy.

In fact, the passage from I Corinthians is one that has become popular for weddings and when I use it I generally say this to the couple, "there will be days when it will be easier to be irritable than patient, easier to be resentful than kind. There will be days when it is hard not to be envious of the other commitments in your spouse's life, not to be rude when you are frustrated or disappointed." Similar things could be said not only of personal, one-on-one relationships but of relationships in community and relationships in our divided world.

And yet, into all of our situations - with those we know and care about, and even with those we call enemy...in times of relative peace and in times of conflict - these words come. And they remind us of the importance of living from love - not the love of Hallmark cards, but the love of God which is about choosing again and again, even when it is difficult, to work for the good of others.

And friends, we hear these words today, as we celebrate Commitment Sunday, as we remember the ministry we have shared in this past year and as we look toward another year of being church together in our community. And this is important. After all, this year has reminded us in many ways how important love and patience, kindness and generosity, selflessness and humility are.

These are characteristics we need as we continue to work to be church together, to support one another, to be one body even as we are scattered, separated in our homes by a virus that just doesn't want to go away.

And these are characteristics that we need as we continue to work to be church in this world - this world which is so divided, this world in which it seems few people are listening to those who differ from them and even fewer are trying to understand.

And it is into this world that we are called to be church and called, not individually, but together. It is into this world that we are called to shine the light of God's love. It is into this world that we are called to go with a message of love and compassion, justice and mercy, welcome for all.

Friends, as we continue to be church in 2020 and as we look toward 2021, we do so keeping love at our core. We do so knowing that the grace and patience we are called to extend will need to go even a little further. We do so knowing that this will be difficult some days, but that at the center of who we are is God's love - love that is already patient and kind and working for the good of the other; love that is the source of the love we share.

So, as we look ahead to the coming year...as we make our commitments to continue to be church together in this community we know as First Christian Church, a community called to serve the world...let us tap into the love that God gives to us...let us share it freely with each other...and let us share it beyond the walls of our building and the places we are already connected...let us share God's love with the world. Amen.