

**Barre Congregational Church**  
**January 30, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser**  
**~ Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany ~**  
***“What is life without the love of God?”***  
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**Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13 v 1-13**

**I. Introduction:**

Making noise at the right time, such as cheering on your sports team, is a perfectly legitimate expression of support for your team. Sometimes a noisy crowd supporting the one team or player, can be hard on the opponents, but that crowd is screaming their hearts and lungs out for the ones who they support. Listening to music at a concert is awesome for those who appreciate the sound of music, whether soft or a bit louder. Sometimes, however, making noise can have a negative effect on those in the vicinity or around you. Waking up at the sound of a snow plough early in the morning, or construction work across or down the street, can be hard or even annoying for the one who is trying to rest. Making noise is something Paul is using in our passage to make a point about the Christian life and how we called to be. Let’s see what he means...

**II. The Gifts of the Spirit and the Love of God**

Paul addresses the church in Corinth, first counsels them about their behaviors and divisions in the church, and that as children of God, they need to work towards unity. He then goes on and talks about the gifts of the Spirit of God, which they have all received in different capacities. These gifts are all different for each one of them, and then he compares the Body of Christ to the physical body with its different parts and functions. While the different body parts are different, they rely on each other to function well and optimally. When one body part suffers the rest of the body suffers as well. In the same way the Body of Christ needs all parts to function well. These gifts of the Spirit they all received are precious, and key to the building up of the church.

Then in Chapter 13 He introduces them to the most excellent gift of all, and that is the love of God. He is contrasting the gifts they received, such as prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, gifts of healing, speaking in tongues, to the love of God that continuously build up. He especially

addresses the elite in the church in Corinth, those who believe they have the knowledge and wisdom, that distinguishes them from those who are “lesser than them”, pointing out that knowledge can puff up, but love builds up (Chapter 8 v 1-3). To boast about knowledge and wisdom that gives you status and power, is not quite what God is expecting from the followers of Christ.

Paul summarizes for us in verses 1-3 what it means to be equipped with spiritual gifts, but to lack the love of God, using himself as an example, “If I speak in tongues...if I have the gift of prophecy that can fathom all mysteries and knowledge... if I have faith that can move mountains, and if I give all my possessions to the poor, but I have not love...I am just a lot of noise, I am nothing, and I gain nothing. These are strong words to the Christians in Corinth. These are concerns for him, because it came to him that there were those who used their spiritual gifts in arrogant ways and created a distance between them and those who had less than them. All spiritual gifts are gifts from God, and they need to be used not for one’s self-interest, but for the purpose of building up the church of Christ. “Spiritual people are marked by their love, rather than their grace-gifts”, says Paul D. Gardner in the Zondervan Commentary on 1 Corinthians. Gardner continues by saying, “A spiritual person is able to discern and to judge things and see the difference between boasting in the Lord and boasting in oneself. It is a path of humility, not a path of boasting”.

### **III. What is this Love of God?**

Let us look to the One who showed us the path of love. Jesus was able to live a life filled with compassion, mercy, and love for all people. He was able to do so, because He was filled with the Spirit of God, as we saw last week. The Spirit of God is the powerful force that enables the purpose and will of God to be revealed through humanity, and Christ was that Person whom God used to demonstrate the utmost love of God for humanity. The Holy Spirit in Christ brings forth life and vitality and goodness and mercy and love.

Love is therefore not one of the spiritual gifts Paul describes but is the highest gift that all other spiritual gifts draw from. The Good News of Christ was a message of love to all those who asked Him a question about this or that, or who challenged Him and His message. His responses always drew from the central commandment He came to teach and demonstrate, and that is to

love God with all one's heart, and neighbor as oneself. It was a message that encourages His listeners to be a certain way, a way of being for the other, in ways you would want to be for yourself.

In verses 4 – 6 Paul describes for them what this love is. He describes love not as a passive gift, but as an action. Love is patient and kind, he starts off...The word for patience in the Old Testament draws directly from the being of God, who was patient with the people of Israel through their ups and downs. To be patient with others, with someone, is to put up with what is good and not so good about them, what makes sense and what does not make sense about that person. This feels a bit challenging from a human perspective, right? Yes, it can be, but his point is that to be patient with others, comes from the Divine love in us, not our own love for that person. It is the love of God that is patient with us, that drives us to be patient with others. Similarly, to be kind to others, is to be filled with a constant stream of love coming from God, showing up as kindness towards others. Christian love is therefore not all the negative things that he then describes: It does not envy, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, and not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs.

This love is eternal, and it pulls us in, and it embraces us despite our weaknesses, our feelings of inadequacy. This love always protects, always hopes, always perseveres.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

To have this love, which Paul describes is about surrendering to God all that we are and all that we wish to be. Being filled with this love means we too become the instruments Christ wants us to be. This love does not puff up, and is not noisy; instead, it helps us being present with others in ways they feel safe with us. May God help us all to have this love, and may God fill us with God's Holy Spirit, so that we don't have to work so hard at loving others, but that it will flow through us day after day. Amen.