

**A letter to good people of Scarboro United Church
Based on 1 Corinthians 13.1-13**

February 3, 2019

Rev. Erin Klassen

From Erin, a follower of the way of Christ, to the church of God in Scarboro, and all who might hear this message.

Grace and peace to you, dear friends.

I am disappointed not to be among you this day, so I must express my gratitude to those whom you have seen in leadership today. By sharing of themselves, they are showing us how to offer what we have for the good of the church and for all people. They show us but one way to love.

Love is showing up for one another.

Love is helping to carry the burden.

Sometimes love even looks like staying home when you are unwell.

Indeed, it is only because of the love of this community that I am able to send this message today.

In our first letter this morning, recited by Joe, we hear Paul speak of love.

We often, *so often*, hear this passage at weddings, when folks are full of hope and joy. When they feel so excited that they might be able to move mountains. When they think themselves nothing without this person to whom they are making a commitment. They feel that their love can be all these things: patient and kind, not jealous or stuck up, not rude or self-seeking, not angry or resentful...

To my knowledge, there is no wedding planned for this morning. (Wouldn't that be a surprise?)

But that does not make this passage any less applicable. In my opinion, it makes it more so. Paul was not writing to a couple, Paul was writing to a congregation. The love of which he speaks is not romantic, it is a love based in kinship, or community, a love that comes from a place of compassion and empathy.

Yes, it is still beautiful and idyllic, but it is also a lot of pressure.

Love may be patient and kind, but as people, we aren't always.

Life is messy and we are human, imperfect.

That, friends, is why I "love" this passage.

Paul writes of a love that is perfect, complete, and whole. In Greek, it can also translate as "mature". He speaks of thinking and reasoning like a child. Noting that when he grew up, he put away childish things.

Paul is asking us to grow into love. To grow into faith.

To treat love less like a feeling, and more like a *skill*.

Cultivate it and hone it.

Practice it.

Because life will give us plenty of opportunities to practice.

While it is written as a best-case scenario, what Paul has to say is meant to be supportive in the midst of the complications of life and the messiness of relationships.

Because there are days when we are struggling to be patient and kind.

There are days when we do feel irritable, or maybe superior.

There are times when we are snarky or rude.

There are times when we do react in anger; or nurse the wounds of having been wronged.

In those times, Paul encourages us to Practice Love.

To let love be what leads us, knowing that it is like a muscle or a skill and gets stronger the more we practice.

The more often we turn to love, the more loving we will be.

As we seek truth, we will become more honest and authentic.

The more we trust, the more trusting and more trusted, we will become.

In hope, we find more hope.

We will endure.

But we must be careful because this kind of passage, of how to love, has been weaponized in the past and used by people in power to oppress the marginalized. Brushing off the harms done to folk by telling them that “love keeps no record of wrongs”.

As I’ve emphasized before, the Scripture is not a weapon.

To keep ourselves on the right path let us hear again what Paul is saying.

He is encouraging us to practice loving, yes.

But he is also telling us how we will recognize love when we encounter it in the world.

We will know it is love because it will be patient and kind.

We will know it is love because it will not be jealous.

We will know it is love because it will not be rude, or self-seeking, or prone to anger.

We will know it is love because it will rejoice in the truth.

It will be strong, trusting, hopeful.

Paul wanted the people to know that they should be kind, and that they deserve kindness.

He instructs us not to be resentful, and that we should not feel resented.

We love because we are deserving of love, we are loved – by one another and by God.

It is in this way that we see face to face.

It is this knowledge, that we are so loved by God, the one we proclaim, that we know that love is without limits. Love is all inclusive. Love is also tenacious.

God knows us fully and loves us fiercely.

We have a foundation of love.

We are surrounded by love.

We are worthy of love.

We have the capacity to love.

We have the skill set for this.

Therefore, my friends, let us all have endurance and bear with one another.

When times are tough, or even when they are not, believe in yourselves, and put your hope in one another and in God. Always remember this day and everyday that we have a love that is worth practicing and celebrating – you are worth celebrating.

I give thanks to God for you everyday.