

January 31, 2016



Youth Sunday

Sermon by the Seniors

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

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

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Alejandro Quintana:

Good morning. I am Alejandro Quintana and I have attended this church for all my life. And now, I'd like to discuss my thoughts and observations of today's Scripture with very same community that has watched me grow for all these years. Today's Scripture comes from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, in which he offers corrections to the many faults of the Corinthian Church. In our verses, Paul highlights the importance of Love for all the people of Christ, by contrasting this Love with the behavior of this wayward church.

This opposition illustrates the errors of the Corinthians in their practice. Unlike Love, they are "jealous". Unlike Love, they are "arrogant". In contrast to the Corinthians, Paul asserts that there is no room in Love for judgement. Yet, judgement is first nature to humans. This is what plagues the members of this church in Corinth: they view their beliefs as the absolute way to worship the Lord. As followers of Christ, we must remember to act against this very nature and open our hearts to everyone and everything. I can confidently say that the UMYF community, unlike our Corinthians, has mastered this art of nonjudgement. Throughout all the years participating at Youth Group, never once have I felt judged by another. In fact, the only member of this community who has judged me is I, myself. I have always been preoccupied in behaving as I imagined others would prefer and thus, I've tended to be much more reserved and rigid than others. Yet Youth Group has taught me to ignore the eyes of others, and to do what I truly want to do, even if it may seem silly or childish. This loving impulse drove me, for example, to immerse my face into a pool of oatmeal in search of marbles during Mayhem, one of the myriads of enjoyable and interesting, to say the least, moments of youth group. And so, through my participation with youth group, not only did I find a community that did not judge, but I found a community that taught me not to judge as well. This is the Love that Paul describes, a Love devoid of judgment. And this is the Love we owe others, offering unconditional embrace and acceptance.

This is the Love that "moves mountains".

In the text, Paul asserts the fragility of the gifts which the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon us and their absolute dependence on Love. Two of the demonstrations that Paul uses to illustrate this relationship really provoked my reflection. First is his comparison of polyglots who don't show Love to clanging gongs. As a polyglot myself, I began to wonder whether I do sound like a clashing cymbal from time to time. Then the deeper meaning began to reveal itself to me: knowledge not devoted to Love is useless. Only if you use your knowledge to express your Love will it have any effect. My desire to study political science in college was also sparked by reflection that led to similar conclusions. I am overjoyed to announce that I will be attending Harvard University this fall, and I hope to spend my next four years there with Love firmly established in my heart. I was also affected by the affirmation that generosity without sincerity is worthless. It does often seem like we calculate how our own generosity will aid us in the future. We corrupt the notion of Karma, doing "good" actions for the parallel reward rather than being generous for its own sake. For youth in High School, this is a common conflict. Often pushed to do countless hours of community service, we wonder whether our commitment is truly expressed out of Love. I began to ponder how this implication applies to my own service, our annual Youth Service Project in particular. Initially worried, I gratefully realized that this is service as the Lord meant it to be. We all dedicated our work with Love and through this Love made the true difference. Moreover, the real gifts we provided did not originate purely from our physical labor, but rather came from the unison and joy with which our groups worked, from the earnest desire to bond and to help our homeowners. These gifts are rooted in our countless loving experiences, from telling stories as we sat for lunch to hiking to the local waterfalls to flee the heat. The Love that each member carried with him or herself is what "moved" the drywall, the paint-buckets, the "mountains".

To me, today's Scripture's most beautiful revelation is that Love is the only priority. Everything else is contingent upon Love. Paul suggests that the qualities traditionally known as the Theological Virtues, described as faith, hope, and Love, all flow uniquely from Love itself. With just Love, we eternally have unlimited faith and hope and all the other virtues of

Methodism and Christianity. But faith and hope, however strong, are useless without Love. The Holy Scriptures reveal to us that Love is omnipotent. This is God's ultimate message, the epistle's most valuable revelation. All Humankind rejoices in God's Love, Mountains wholeheartedly obey God's Love, and even Hate flees God's Love. Thus, us men and women, we rejoice in the original Greek words of Paul: *νυνὶ δὲ μένει πίστις, ἐλπίς, ἀγάπη, τὰ τρία ταῦτα, μείζων δὲ τούτων ἡ ἀγάπη*. Now faith, hope, and Love remain—these three things—and the greatest of these is Love.

Haylie Wollitz:

Good morning, my name is Haylie Wollitz. For many of you, this is just another one of the many youth Sundays you have and will see. For me, this is *my* youth Sunday. I have been anticipating this day since I participated in my first youth Sunday six years ago. It came far quicker than I could have ever fathomed.

I grew up and attended preschool here. I have been physically present ever since, but I don't think I was always fully present mentally. In my younger years, I saw "going to church" as the day we dressed up then drew in a Jesus coloring book for an hour, got free food, then went home.

Then it became a chore. I didn't want to go to youth group because I hadn't spoken to these youth since Sunday school. I missed youth my 6 grade year.

I only started going in 7 San Diego and told me "to try it out see how I like it, maybe I'll have fun." I don't think I ever told her this, but she couldn't have been more right.

My parents have done so much for me, but one of the best things they did was continue to bring me to church, even when I felt like I doubted God.

Fast forward to tenth grade. I was diagnosed with depression but I had been experiencing symptoms for many years prior. I began questioning my faith around this time. If God was real, why would he allow me to self-destruct. Why wasn't God protecting me at the time I needed Him the most.

It didn't make sense to me and this is when I made a box labeled "Letters to God." I saw this in a movie once: a little boy with cancer writes letters to God as his way of prayer, so I began doing that. It helped me to write down what I was feeling since I couldn't make sense of it in my head.

I also turned to my church family for support. The love I felt while around members of my church family is part of the reason I was able to heal. Love can move mountains. It did for me. I felt love strong enough to bring me back from the dark place into which I had fallen.

Coming to church became my safe space. Public speaking is terrifying for me, but here I am, standing here, presenting my soul to you, talking about my faith, talking about my journey with depression, feeling extremely vulnerable, but safe. I feel love. The love that allowed me to heal.

This is my second home, and I know this place like the back of my hand. Sometimes if I am here on a day that isn't Sunday, I will come in here and play that piano. I'm not sure if that's even allowed. My apologies :) Being in here alone with the lights off playing piano is a really amazing thing. I feel like it's just me and God hanging out having a jam session like us youth do on Sunday nights.

On our youth retreat this month, we took personality tests. I was presented as being an "INFP." Ya I don't really know what that means either, but basically it told me that I'm "interested in helping people and serving humanity."

Those of you who know me, know that that is a pretty good way of describing me. I found my calling younger than most people. This calling has led me to the people of Nepal and the girls of Unatti Foundation.

When I stepped foot on Nepali soil for the first time, I knew that this is what I was going to devote my life to. My love for that country is *going* to move mountains. I am *going* to help change the lives of children stuck hauling bricks in Nepali brick factories.

Everything means nothing without love. Giving money to a cause is just an action, but is there love behind it? I am not satisfied unless I am physically there with these people, changing their lives, moving mountains with them.

I'm standing up here, which means I'm a senior. Being a senior means college next year. I will be going to New York to study photography at Parsons School for Design. College means moving to the other side of the country for me. College means starting fresh. College means leaving my church and my youth family.

These people sitting behind me are all beautiful people I am so grateful to know. They have seen me at my best and at my worst... and at my even worse. They have physically picked me back up and reminded me to keep going. Knowing that we will all be in different states next year breaks my heart... Especially since communicating is not everyone's strong suit.

My sister, Emma is my best friend, and living without her across the hall seems nearly impossible. Driving home together from youth on Sunday nights has become our catch up time and it has been for the last five years.

We are tied together by the same faith and I know our love for each other is strong enough to move mountains... Or fly over them to visit each other. To love is to recognize yourself in another. I see myself in each of them.

And so now I leave you with the words of Dostoevsky: "We shall be parting soon. Soon I shall leave this town, perhaps for a very long time. And so we shall part. Let us agree here that we will never forget one another. And whatever may happen to us later in life, even if we do not meet for twenty years afterwards, let us never forget how good we once felt here, all together, united by such good and kind feelings. I give you my word that for my part I will never forget anyone of you; each face that is looking at me now, at this moment, I will remember, be it even after thirty years."

Lauryn Wilson

To say life can be challenging is an understatement. Life can kick you when you're down and take things unexpectedly, leaving you with the question of why? Why is this happening to me? It would be wrong of me to tell you I know the answer to this, but one thing that has gotten me through some really tough times, is love.

The hardest thing I've ever had to go through is when my mom died on June 8, 2014. She had lost her battle to cancer, and I had lost a best friend. Anger, frustration, depression- I felt them all, and all very intensely. It confused me as to why a wonderful woman like her could be given this fate, why my mom had been taken away from me. I was to the point of not believing in God at all and looked at church in a very negative light. I avoided going to church and distanced myself from friends and family even though they showed me nothing but love and compassion.

But something changed when I decided to go on the youth service project in New Orleans over summer. Before the trip, I had a meeting with Robert about some of the trip details. While I was filling out a form, I thought a lot about some of the things that bothered me about religion, one of them being that gay men and women have been shunned from worship. I knew plenty of people who were gay and I didn't understand why it was such a problem, so I decided to ask Robert what he thought. My exact question was "If a gay man or woman came in to worship, what would you do? Would you have a problem with it?" Robert responded in the most wonderful way possible. He said that he would have no problem with it and that he doesn't believe homosexuality is a sin. Hearing this made me realize how accepting and loving this church really is, and how lucky I am to be a part of it.

So I went on the trip, not knowing what to expect. I wasn't as involved in youth group as everyone else and was a little worried that I wouldn't quite fit in. I can honestly say that I was so wrong to think that because everyone was so friendly and accepting. I saw the people around me working hard to improve the lives of others and I realized that I wanted to be a part of this. I got to know all of them on a deeper level and had so much fun working with them, even though it was over 100 degrees while we were all wearing heavy overalls.

This trip showed me how powerful love really is. Because of love, victims of Hurricane Katrina were getting the help they needed. Because of love, I was able to feel a part of a community that I was hesitant to join in the first place. I eventually realized that I needed to accept the love and compassion from my friends and family and to always give that love and compassion back. Although I miss my mom terribly, it's given me a lot of perspective and made me appreciate the smaller things in life. The message I really want you to take from this is to keep your heart and mind open even if you're hurting, because you'll regret it if you don't. Tell those you love that you love them, offer a helping hand when needed, and let others know you appreciate them, because you never know what the future holds and what lessons God has planned to teach you.

Colin Heffner:

Good morning, my name is Colin Heffner.

Love has always been a touchy subject for me. On one hand, it has brought me unimaginable happiness, but on the other, it has caused me an incredible amount of pain and suffering. I firmly believe, though, that finding and sharing love is our sole purpose as human beings.

When I was a sophomore in high school, I encountered the greatest adversity thus far in my life. My Grandmother passed away unexpectedly, just an hour before I got on a plane to go see her. A week afterwards, my girlfriend of a year and a half broke up with me for a guy whom she had met on a school trip to Spain. I subsequently fell into a deep depression and stopped attending school.

Not only did this experience challenge my faith, but it also made me question love. It was incomprehensible to me that someone could do something so cruel to someone who they supposedly loved unconditionally.

In the midst of my psychological meltdown, I was faced with a very difficult task. My mother had signed me up to go on the youth service project to Fentress County Tennessee with our church's youth group. Not only had I never participated in a service project, but I had become relatively estranged from my fellow youth. I spent the entire plane ride to Tennessee listening to music with my eyes closed, talking to no one.

There came a point where I realized that there was going to be no way for me to spend an entire week with these people without conversing with them. They engaged me and tried to spark a conversation, and I had no choice but to open up. Within a few hours I had realized how wrong I was about our youth. I'm not sure what I expected from them, but what I saw was a group of genuine, non-judgmental people, who all had one thing in common; a tremendous amount of love.

The love that I felt during that week, from those people whom I'd really only just met, showed me that love comes in many different ways. It's not only romantic, and it's not just shared by those who have known each other for an extended period of time. Love can be expressed through charity, through service, or through simply, such as in my case, allowing a person to feel welcome and accepted.

The unconditional love I have felt and continue to feel from my fellow youth, and my youth leaders has taught me to be comfortable in my own skin, has allowed me to change my perspective on life, and has helped me motivate myself to accomplish things that once seemed impossible. Love, the thing that I once dismissed as cruel and pointless, has allowed me to push aside the fear and doubt that had been holding me back. Love has let me move mountains. It's as simple as that. Thank you.