

Everybody believes in love. Al Qaida, the Mafia, the Crips and the Bloods. The Nazi's believed in love. Stalin, Castro. Maybe there have been a few who have not loved their own, some who have loved only themselves, but wherever there is an in group, wherever there is a we that is out to get them, wherever there is a strong belonging love is likely to be present. Even in the most complicated families where alcohol or violence poisons every relationship, when an outsider criticizes the family, family members bond together, even if it means protecting the very one who is harming the family.

“Love makes the world go round” we used to say. The Beatles sang, “All we need is love.” And I teach preschoolers to sing, “Love, love, love, that’s what its all about.

Everybody believes in love. The question is, “Love for whom?”

Will we love Americans, and hate any who threaten or disagree with our country?

Will we love only the law abiding Americans?

Will we love only the Christian law-abiding Americans?

Sometimes in our nation’s history love was reserved love only for those who emigrated from the same part of the world that our ancestors did so that Americans who were of English descent despised more newly arrived Americans from Italy or Ireland. When Chinese workers were shipped in from the Far East to lay the ribbon of iron rails for the trains to cross the prairies, though they were contributing to the greatness of this nation in the hearts of many there was no love for them.

Everybody believes in love - for us.

When Jesus came to his home town, he spoke about love for them. He said he was sent to bring love to them. He pointed to two moments in the history of God’s people – two moments when God’s prophet was sent to bring blessings to those who were not a part of Israel. The outsider, the enemy, blessed when the hometown folks were not. And the people of Jesus hometown intended to throw him off a cliff, but Jesus left

them safely. Now the folks in Nazareth believed in love for us. But Jesus said God sent him to bring love to them.

What if Jesus is right about God? Not just back then in his hometown but here and now. Once Jesus said, “you must be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Immediately before he spoke those words he spoke of God as the one who sends his rain on the evil and on the good and makes his sun to shine on the just and on the unjust. Jesus was teaching that we are to love our enemies, and pray for those who persecute us.

Everybody believes in love. But almost nobody believes in loving enemies, loving the very ones who are persecuting us. But Jesus believes in that love.

Sometimes I think that God puts us together in congregations of believers just so that we can learn about Jesus’ kind of love – congregations like the one at Corinth.

Not everybody was nice in the Corinthian Christian Church. Rich people in that congregation looked down their noses on the poor ones, held their feasts before the poor ones got off work. By the time the poor ones arrived the food and the wine were all gone. After that maybe the poor ones were saying some not so nice things about the rich ones.

Some of the Corinthian Christians thought they were really hot stuff. When they spoke or sang they thought the world should stop and pay attention. And when they did not like what some others brought to worship, they showed their disdain or displeasure. Now things like that could never happen in a church today but back there with the Corinthians things like that happened. So what did Paul tell them?

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. ²And 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. ³If 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.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Who was Paul speaking to? Every member of the Corinthian congregation. Every one called to love,

Sometimes it is easier to love Haitians caught in an earthquake than it is to love the member of the church who criticized you, especially that member of the church who you asked to lead the project and that member said no, she was too busy. But now she is the very one who is criticizing the way you did it. It is easier to feel love for Haitians than for her. But God's word through Paul is to love her – to not be irritable or resentful, arrogant or rude, but to love. That is God's word for her as well but that is between her and God.

Why does Paul call you to such love? Because this is how God loves you - not giving you what you deserve but what you need. Paul understood this better than most anyone else because he had been out to destroy the followers of Jesus and Jesus loved him and forgave him.

Jesus loves you and forgives you. Love as Jesus loves.