

"A Loving and Caring Congregation"

*Let me invite you to open your Bible and read
the 13th Chapter of
Paul's first letter
to the church at Corinth.*

This week I have been tallying the results of our congregational survey to determine the Core Values of our Chapel and I have been writing a wedding ceremony that I will use to celebrate my brother-in-law's marriage. Both of these seemingly unrelated efforts actually have one central theme...love. One of the Core Values that our Board members proposed is, "We are a loving and caring congregation" and surely all of us can agree that at a wedding, love between two people stands center stage.

No doubt Paul's wonderful essay on love in 1 Corinthians is the most misused and overused scripture in wedding liturgies...misused because this verse has absolutely nothing to do with the ideal of marital love and overused because preachers like me just can't give up misusing it. This passage was originally written, not to address romantic love or even the love between friends, but the love that people share within a community of faith.

Paul wrote this letter to a church whose members were struggling to love one another. At the church in Corinth they had allowed petty bickering and power struggles to infect their community and compromise their ministry. It's easy to infer how they were treating one another by noting all the negative adjectives used in the letter: love is not envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude. Surely if this is the way the folks at First Church Corinth were behaving then you can plainly see why they were having trouble, so Paul writes to remind them how to lovingly treat one another as they worship and serve God in community.

Sometimes as church members we do not love each other so well. Maybe one member hurts another's feelings by talking behind their backs. Sometimes we speak harshly to one another before we take time to think about how we are expressing ourselves. Sometimes forgiveness is hard to find and bitter resentments persist. There will be times when we disagree with a sermon, an adopted policy of the Board, or even the color of the carpet in the conference room. Some conflict in the church is normal, but it is how we respond and live with the conflict that will define us as a "loving and caring congregation".

How we love and care for one another in our Chapel family is both a reflection of our close relationship with God and an example of God's love to those outside our church. People will be drawn to a community where folks treat one another with kindness, respect, and patience...mostly because these qualities are so rare in the secular world around us. If the church...our Chapel...is a place that is indeed loving and caring...a place where love, hope, and forgiveness is found, then those outside our church will be open to experiencing God by joining our faith community. In fact, the way we love each other may very well be our most effective means of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and an essential part of any church growth program that our Board might envision for the future.

So, will I include Paul's words on love in my brother-in-law's wedding? Absolutely! And, is the Chapel in the Pines a "loving and caring congregation"? Without a doubt! In fact it's one of our identified Core Values and we are all so proud of it. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will give us the enthusiasm, energy, and courage to share this love throughout our larger community so that our love might be a reflection of God's love and an irresistible invitation for others to join us.

Peace,
Pastor Paul