

**1 John 4:7-21**

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent God's only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent a Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and this love is perfected in us.

<sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in God and God in us, because the Spirit has been given to us. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and do testify that God has sent the Son as the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup>So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. <sup>17</sup>Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as Christ is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup>We love because God first loved us. <sup>20</sup>Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup>The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

**1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup>For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup>but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love

My final semester of high school, I embarrassingly got hooked on the soap opera “The Young and the Restless.” I was sort of sliding out, with only five out of seven periods with classes, so I would get home early. And there was a woman living with us for a few months, Teresa, and when I would get home she would be on the couch watching the “Young and the Restless”, and so I started to join her for the end. And then, after a week or two, I would hustle home to make sure I got to watch as much of our Soap as possible, and Teresa would fill me in on any of the juicy details I might have missed.

Teresa was pregnant. She was living with us because she had decided make an adoption plan, knowing that this was the most loving choice she could make for her baby at this point in her life. And she knew that her family would not accept her decision on this matter, that they would try to intervene to stop the adoption process or take the baby – she did not want her family raising her baby, knowing that this would not be a good situation for her child – just as it had not been a good situation for her as a child. And so, when Teresa was at the stage where she was showing, she came to live at our house to make sure her family would not find out she was pregnant.

Teresa worked with my mom – my mom had become a mentor of sorts to her, and so when she found herself pregnant and scared, she turned to my mom. And she was invited into her home. Thus, my three months of addiction to the Young and the Restless.

In my household growing up, while we said the thing about “all sins being equal”, it was clearly communicated over my lifetime that two things were actually worse than the rest: drinking and

having sex before marriage. These were the things repeated in various ways and forms from my mother to her children throughout my childhood, with a special emphasis when we were between the ages 12 to 20. My mom had two main tactics for reinforcement of these views, the first with drinking was to search the paper for any drinking related accidents or arrests, and when she would find them, would plop the paper down in front of you and say, “here, read this.” And her second tactic came from her work, she worked at WIC (Women’s Infants and Children) where she often interacted with young mothers. Thus, she never missed an opportunity to say at the dinner table, “well, I had a fifteen year old in my office today.” She wanted to make sure we knew there were real life consequences to any actions we might take.

I had not thought of this brief “Young and the Restless” episode of my life for a long time, but this past week during the Mennonite Church bi-annual convention, it came to mind during a worship service. The theme for the week was “Love is a Verb” – not coincidentally, also my sermon title for today. One of the speakers asked us, “Who is the model for you of what love looks like? When you think about what love looks like with flesh on, who comes to mind? Who has modeled love in profound ways for you?”

It is a great question, “Who is the model of love for you?” And my mom was the first person that came to mind – this was not a surprise, as my parents have long had an open door for people in a bad spot. My mom has lead the way and my dad has been open enough to go along for the ride. But I then I thought of Teresa, and this did surprise, as it had been so long that I had almost forgotten of this small stretch of time that senior year.

I think sitting together for a week with Mennonites from across the country who are struggling to live together in our difference, who are struggling, like many denominations, to know how to live in our differences – to be part of a gathering where it was quite noticeable that over 200 churches have left the denomination since we last met together two years ago – feeling part of a larger group of people who continue to mirror our larger culture which struggles to be in relationship with people who do not agree on everything – I thought of my mom and Teresa. My mom whose top two personal sins were drinking and sex before marriage, being the person that Teresa turned to when she became pregnant and was not married. And, whatever my mom's feelings were about how Teresa got into that situation, she did not hesitate to open her home when Teresa needed it. That was the story that flooded back into my mind as I sat in the back of the worship session yesterday afternoon and thought of who had modeled love for me, of a time when I had seen love with flesh on.

Let us return to the scriptures we heard read this morning and hear a slightly different translation of them - one we heard from a convention speaker:

**1 John 4:7-21**

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us be right, because being right is from God; everyone who is right is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever is not right does not know God, for God is right. <sup>9</sup>God's rightness was revealed among us in this way: God sent God's only Son into the world so that we might be right through him.... <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God was right so much, we also ought to be right. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we are right, God lives in us, and being right is perfected in us.

And of course, Paul's famous words in 1 Corinthians 13, famously known as the "being right chapter."

**1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

<sup>13</sup>And now faith, hope, and being right abide, these three; and the greatest of these is being right.

It is of course not “being right” that John and the apostle Paul write so elegantly about, but love; nor does Jesus tell his disciples, “I give you a new commandment, that you be right. By this they will know you are my disciples, if you are right all the time.” No, they will know we are Jesus’ disciples if we love one another.

But love, as one speaker said this week, *is a squishy term*. We can mold it and bend it to fit into almost any shape, and we do. We can make ‘love’ mean almost anything, or nothing at all. Folks like me, we sometimes talk too generally about love, turning it into one of those religious terms that loses it meaning over time. And so we must continue to enact love and speak about it in concrete terms. To remember and think about those people who have embodied love in our lives, and in our world. Those people who have lived without fear of loving foolishly and wastefully – those who have made us feel loved.

I think of Henry Krewer who many of you know, Henry who helped start Corpus Christi House (Boise’s homeless day shelter) with our former pastor Tim Cooper. When Henry is interacting with guests at Corpus who have a need, his default position is trust. And because of this, things happen that don’t always turn out to be what we might call “a success story.” For example, a story that Henry likes to tell, is about a guest who said he had a couple of jobs power washings – to power wash the siding on someone’s house to clean it, but he needed a power washer to do the job. We had a power washer at Corpus, and so Henry let him borrow it. Well, that power washer never made it back to us, as it got taken to a pawn shop and sold to the shop for something like \$5. When Henry tells this story, he just laughs and says, “that is the price of doing business.” We might say that his is wasteful. I think Henry would say it love. I would say, it is loving wastefully.

And so who has embodied love for you? Who has been love with flesh one? Whose life has shown you the meaning of the words in 1 John, that “perfect love casts our fear?”

Drew Hart, in his concluding message of the Mennonite Church conference yesterday morning used this metaphor: If someone told you that they had been practicing piano for twenty years, and then when they got up to play you a tune, and the best they could deliver was a little ‘heart and soul’ or ‘chopsticks’, we would probably be a little suspicious about what they meant by “practicing.” We would expect a certain level of mastery or ability from someone practicing something for 20 years. And so, he continued, what do we expect of people who have been practicing being Jesus’ disciples for twenty years? What do we expect of those who have been practicing love for twenty years? Certainly more than the loving equivalent to ‘chopsticks’, (which Jesus might call, “loving those only who love us”). What elements should be emerging from us as a congregation who has been around practicing love in the way of Christ these past 40 years here at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Eastman?

I want to close with this thought, that our God of love is a God of covenant – a God who has invited us into a loving relationship with God, with one another, and with all of creation. And so, part of this means that there are boundaries in how we offer love – not limits to our love, not limits in how much we love, but boundaries in how we show that love, in how we offer that love. Again, as I think about the example for me of who has been the model of love, it is my mom. And her lines are extremely fuzzy, since I left home they have had at least 20 people live

with them at some point – from a few weeks, to a few years. And even she has had to figure boundaries for how to best embody love.

My mom had a terribly difficult relationship with her father, leading to my mom moving out when she was a teenager. And it has always been tense. Every time they would get together, he would bring up things from the past and things would explode, following their usual pattern of interaction. And as he neared the end of his life, she would ask herself, how am I going to feel when he dies. And so she decided that she needed to see him more often, but when she went she said, “Dad, I am going to come see you, but we are not talking about the past anymore. We are just going to be together. And if you are going to bring up the past, then I am going to leave.” And every time she would visit him, he would try to bring up the past, and she would remind him of their agreement. And he would stop. And they would sit together and watch the birds. And she found peace.

And so, our love is unconditional, it is limitless AND it must have boundaries at times; to keep us safe, to keep us whole – so we can continue to love as God loves.

May we be a people of great and unending love. A people who put love into action. A people who value love over being right. A people who enact love in personal and public ways. A people who love in spite of fear. “By this they will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.” Amen.

