

Sermon 051015 Motherhood  
Scripture- 1Corinthians 13  
Sermon Title- Motherly Love

The Bible text that I have chosen for today is a text that is as familiar to us as any New Testament text. It is often referred to as St. Paul's 'Love Hymn.' It is the thirteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to the church he started in Corinth. The reason it is so familiar is that it is commonly read at Christian weddings. It is also familiar because it is beautiful not only in the writing, but in the message.

Now, Paul did not write this passage so that it would be read at weddings. Paul was not thinking of marriage love when he wrote it. He was describing love as it flows from God to us and through us to others. The theological term for this love is agape. It is kind of a love lesson: Love 101. Paul crafts the words to show that this kind of love is not reward-filled romantic love, but love that can be, and often is, a challenge to live out. "Love is patient, love is kind. Love never fails. Love endures." This is love that is more about giving than getting. No, Paul is not talking about romantic love. He was not really talking about motherly love either, but motherly love is the best example we have that challenging love as Paul describes it can and does exist in the world. "Love is patient. Love is kind. Love never fails. Love

endures.” I think we can learn the powerful love lesson from Paul by aspiring to motherly love.

We all need to be reminded of something about motherhood. There are many women who live wonderful and successful lives without ever experiencing motherhood. Not being a mother is painful for many women. We sometimes hear that becoming a mother “completes” a woman somehow. The non-mothers need to be reminded that that is just not true. Is motherhood a wonderful thing? Yes, but it is not the end all and be all of being a woman. Parenthood does not mean personhood. Some of the best and most fulfilled women that I have known have not been mothers. I say that as a man who has never been a dad.

Now, are all mothers’ great examples of motherly love? We know that the answer to that is ‘no.’ Are there people who have never been mothers who are great examples of motherly love? You bet...and that includes many men. So, when we speak of motherly love, we are not strictly speaking of mothers.

A difference between motherly love and fatherly love comes to mind. That is the difference between unconditional love and conditional love. Dad wants the kid to not only win, but also be the best in the game. Dad can’t wait to hoist his star kid on his shoulders for all to see. Mom feels that way before the kid ever goes onto the field. Her loves wells up even greater at times of

failure than of victory. “Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” (1Cor 13:7)

In the love hymn, Paul writes of the purity and perseverance of love. He is saying that not only is love often difficult, it is willing to lose. I have someone in my life who had a teenage daughter who at age 15 was a good kid, a good student, and an emerging equestrian with a wall full of riding and jumping ribbons. Suddenly, the girl got in with a drug crowd, dropped out of school, and was in and out, mostly out, of the house for around four years. It was hell on the whole family; mother, father, and the two siblings. At one point, the situation had put such a strain on the family; the mom and dad had a discussion to cut ties with the wayward girl for the sake of the other kids. The couple agreed to make the break. When it came time to make the break, the mom just couldn't do it, she could not give up on her child. It left her husband hanging. Motherly love created some rift in the marriage. That mom's love was willing to lose. But, the child eventually came back and is now a happily married and successful in business and a 33-year-old mother of a beautiful child. “Love is patient, love is kind, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love endures.”

Paul writes in the passage, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I

became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see through a glass darkly; then we will see face to face.” (11, 12) A year ago, I devoted my Mother’s Day sermon to my own sainted Mom. It was the most emotional message I’ve ever given here, and I will not go back there. But it has been 32 years since my Mom passed and I guess you could say that the glass I see her through has grown darker. I have also put childish ways behind me, but not some of the feelings. A lasting feeling is that I was loved fully and without bounds. That is the love that I got that from my mother. Paul writes of full and boundless love from God. That is why I say that motherly love is the best example of Godly love we can know in the world. It bears remembering that no mother, not mine or anyone else’s can love as much as God loves us.

My wife is not here today. Why? She is in Sedona, AZ with her adult children, Charlie and Liz, giving herself her annual Mother’s Day gift- time with her children. Wednesday evening is ‘date night’ for the Fabulous Meg and me. Back in 2008, we started date night with a visit to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and then went out to dinner. While we were at the museum, Meg’s son Charlie contacted her from college in CA. He was on his way to the college clinic with a severe headache. By the time we were done with dinner, he was in the hospital getting a

spinal tap. Meg was on the phone with Charlie and the doc during the whole time, trying to manage the situation from 3,000 miles away. Charlie was quickly fine, by the way. But, after the calls were done and he was going in for the procedure, I was driving us home and Meg went into a tear soaked anxiety wail that was daunting to witness. Motherly love is so... complete. Whatever the experience for the kid, the intensity for the mother is greater than it is for the kid. Charlie will never know the wailing part of the story. No child ever knows the fullness of motherly love.

As we said, motherly love is not restricted to mothers. There was a movie back in 2007 called *The Pursuit of Happyness*” starring Will Smith and his son Jared; you may have seen it. It was based on the real life story of Chris Gardner. Chris Gardner is now wildly rich and the CEO of a successful financial services company. The movie is about when he made some poor investment decisions, and he went into a financial tailspin. His wife left him and their young son, Christopher. Although Chris was working his tail off to turn their situation around, he and his son slipped into homelessness. There is a scene where they are spending the night in a men’s room at Grand Central Station that is one of the most poignant I’ve ever seen on the screen. Throughout the movie, despite his great despair, Chris, now both father and mother, was constantly teaching and nurturing his son. He said,

“Christopher, don’t ever let anyone tell you that you can’t do something, even me.” He challenged his son when the boy needed to be challenged and held him and hugged him when he needed to be hugged. Motherly love is truth. “Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.” (v. 6)

Mary, mother of Jesus, belongs in any discussion of motherly love. She had the most hideous of experiences, witnessing her child’s death. Any parent losing a child has the experience of life’s deepest sorrow. But to have her innocent son tortured and murdered for doing good and showing love had to be unfathomable pain. Yet, she did it with unyielding and abiding love in her heart. “And now, these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (v. 13)

In Paul’s love hymn, he carefully crafts the words to describe God’s presence in the world as evidenced by *love* in the world. In so doing, he shows us what it takes for us to truly love. If we are patient, kind, not rude, not self seeking, not easily angered, keep no record of wrongs, do not delight in evil but rejoice with truth we are showing God’s love. Paul teaches us that even if we can move mountains, which we can, and have not love, we are nothing. If we have God’s love we will always protect, always trust, always hope, and always persevere. It is living in the glory of God’s love that gives us the capacity to love. Those of you who were at the

talent show a few weeks back will remember we got to sing along with the Youth the great Beatles anthem, “All You Need Is Love.” How true that is; how true that is.

Now, here is the challenge. This challenge is for all of us, male and female, parent and non-parent, practitioners of motherly love with their children and those who have never loved this way. We are called by God to love each other this way. This gives a whole new definition to the phrase ‘tough love.’ Love is patient, love is kind, love endures means loving those we are not naturally inclined to love. That is the Christian challenge. That is the nub of our faith. We are called to love the unlovable, the challenging, the annoying, the mean, the petty, the lazy, the insensitive, the self-centered, the ignorant, and the frustrating. We know that this is doable because it exists. They’ll know we are Christians by our love. And now these three things remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love. AMEN