### “Love Hopes All Things” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Feb. 6, 2022

**Hebrews 2:14–17**

14Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. 16For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. 17Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.

**1 Corinthians 13:1–13**

1If 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 prophecy, 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.

4 Love 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.

8 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. 9For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11When 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. 12For 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.

13And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

The Epistle to the Hebrews really is addressed just to Hebrews, that is, to Jewish Christians. The author says something that Paul never says, which is that Christ came to save the sons of Abraham. Paul better understood Jesus’ intentions, and always included the Gentiles in his saving efforts. So we have to alter that line, in our heads.

What *is* really helpful is the statement that the Son had to take on human flesh and blood, and had to become like his brothers and sisters in all things, so that he might be a merciful high priest. The Christ-as-priest idea is also unique to the epistle to the Hebrews. The point is that, for the Son of God to really understand human beings, he had to become one of us. He knows first-hand what it is like to be a helpless babe, to be a growing child, always yearning to be older . . . to be a teenager and young adult . . . to be an adult who made many friends but was also treated unjustly by neighbors and misunderstood by family, to be a grown man with strong friendships and an intense sense of mission, which he fulfilled through his daily encounters as well as through his public ministry.

The life of Jesus was the high point of human history. The many encounters he had, the teaching he imparted, the healings he performed, often healings *with* teaching, and what he endured from his enemies, were all a crucial part of the history of God’s interaction with the human race. It is a story of love, taught and practiced. Every sermon, really, could be about love, and not just in the month that has a holiday for love. It is a love that can overcome the fear of death, for it is love that endures forever.

Speaking of love, the First Corinthians passage is one of the most celebrated in the Bible, although you might notice that it spends much of the time saying what love is *not*. And that’s important. We have to know what love is *not* if we would develop a mature idea of what it *is*. It’s not speaking in tongues; it’s not the same as understanding or faith. It is not envious; it does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable (vv. 4–5). So it’s not any kind of power grasping or domination.

Christians have all too often used religion as a road to power. I remember a young Pentecostal believer criticizing a church he was visiting because, in his opinion, they didn’t pray in tongues *enough*. That’s a power trip. Even though, at that time, I was one who believed I was able to pray in tongues, I remember thinking to myself, “what he said, that’s not right.” I could feel that it was not loving.

Now in verse 4, Paul does start saying what love *is*: “Love is patient; love is kind . . . [it] rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (13:4, 6–7). “Love never ends” (13:8). Some of these I would interpret metaphorically. I don’t think a loving person actually blindly believes *all things*; rather, it means a loving person is basically trusting, thinks the best of others. And, in the same way, I don’t think such a person *literally* hopes all things, but he or she *would* be full of an infectious spiritual hope and the generosity of spirit that comes with that. It’s really a poetic description of unselfish love. The Corinthians seem to be a congregation that is full of enthusiasm, a feeling of freedom and of spiritual power. Paul is telling them that’s allwell and good, as long as you have love, for love is more important than all other spiritual gifts. With love as your foundation you are, as individuals and as a church, able to resolve problems as they arise, perhaps not instantly, but thoughtfully, in the long run.

He says prophecy will end; tongues will cease; knowledge will come to an end. But love will never end. And we will all *be* known by the one who loves us, and we will see face to face (vv. 8–12). I think he means seeing Jesus. God and Jesus know us so much better than we know them. God knows what needs to be done to help us grow, and life is all about growth.

In essence, we are all like children with our arms stretched out for love. We have to realize that God is reaching out to us, too, so we don’t suffer from that feeling of being forgotten and unanswered that afflicts many people. So many have an empty place in their hearts, thinking they are unloved or unlovable. I’m sure we have all had those moments. But some wrestle with whether they *want* it or not, and never give it a chance, never dip their toe in the water. For some, it’s easier to feel resentment than to humbly ask for help and trust that it can come. Thus, they miss out on the beauty of spiritual truth.

But if we believe love can come into our lives, we are transformed. I remember when I was saved. I suddenly had a circle of friends. I quit smoking. I started writing songs of faith. I felt loved, and this has stayed with me to the present. Among the Christian values, which is the most important? Paul mentions the triad “faith, hope, and love,” and makes it clear that love is the greatest of these (v. 13). Jesus’ love is not abstract and theoretical, because he lived a flesh-and-blood life and loved *particular* people. That experience informs his love for us today. He understands whatever we’re going through. He knows humanness. He experienced it first-hand. He became “like his brothers and sisters in every respect” (Heb 2:17).

Let us learn to love more effectively every day. Part of that is becoming a compassionate listener, endeavoring to understand others’ motives. Another part would be affirming to people that God loves them, and wishes to bestow Spirit upon them in this lifetime, while Jesus has prepared mansions in heaven for them (John 14:2), if they wish to journey into God’s everlasting kingdom.

God and Jesus love you. In fact, you are surrounded by love. You only need to ask in order to receive it, to begin to see the changes that love brings.