

## Call to Worship

Today, the words of God come to us, in love,  
**inviting us to not be afraid, but to place our faith in God.**

Today, the word of God comes to us, in faith,  
**inviting us to trust in the One who knows us,  
to place our hope in the One who saves us.**

Today, the Word of God comes to us, in hope,  
**inviting us to be gracious in our love and in our service to others.**

(c) Thom M. Shuman. Sunday, January 27, 2013 Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – C.

## Hymn

*God is love: come heaven, adoring*

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1. God is love: come heaven, adoring;  
God is love: come earth, rejoice.  
Come creation, voices soaring,  
sing exulting with one voice.  
God who laid the earth's foundation,  
God who spread the heavens above,  
God who breathes through all creation—  
God is love, eternal love.
2. God is love, whose arms enfolding  
all the world in one embrace,  
with unflinching grasp are holding  
every child of every race,  
and when human hearts are breaking  
under sorrow's iron rod,  
all the sorrow, all the aching  
wringing with pain the heart of God.
3. God is love, and though with blindness  
sin afflicts all human life,  
God's eternal loving kindness  
guides us through all earthly strife.  
Sin and death and hell shall never  
o'er us final triumph gain;  
God is love: so love forever  
o'er the universe must reign.

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## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of Gods:

We come to worship today to hear your good news,  
to hear of faith, hope and love ringing out from your kingdom.  
We know that doubt, fear and hatred can shake even the strongest.  
Shape us into faithful hopeful people,  
fill us with your love that passes all understanding.

[Discipleship Ministries | Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C... \(umcdiscipleship.org\)](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/)

God of Love

We confess we are sometimes impatient, and often unkind,  
We are quick to envy, and find subtle ways to boast  
There are times we are rude, and lift ourselves up as we put others down.

**Loving God teach us to love**

God of Love

We confess that we are quickly angered  
We are quick to record how often we've been wronged  
There are times we celebrate the misfortune of others

**Loving God teach us to love**

God of Love

We confess that we put ourselves first –  
We're reluctant to give, we are slow to sacrifice,  
There are times we hesitate to protect

**Loving God teach us to love**

When we are tempted to judge, to assume the worst...

**May love remind us to trust**

When we are tempted to despair, to assume all is lost...

**May love remind us to hope**

When we are tempted to give up, to assume it will never happen...

**May love remind us to persevere**

Loving God teach us to love. <https://www.rethinkworship.com/1-corinthians-13-responsive-reading-about-love/>

God of wisdom, deepen our understanding as we hear the Scriptures read and interpreted today. By your Holy Spirit, reveal new insight into your truth, and equip us to live it out as we follow Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 6th Sunday After Epiphany. February 11th, 2024. Year B.

## Assurance of Forgiveness

God's love never ends! With this good news, we know we are forgiven;  
with this blessing, we know that we are healed.

**Now, we can bear all things, believe all things, hope all things,  
endure all things. Thanks be to God! Amen.**

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## Scripture Reading 1 Corinthians 13

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>And 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. <sup>3</sup>If 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.

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

<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.

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### Message And the Greatest of These is Love

There they stand, the couple, so in love, ready to take on the world. They look stunning as all eyes are on them. The wedding service is about to begin. As the minister moves into the liturgy the reading is the ever familiar and beautiful words of 1 Corinthians 13 the Love Chapter as it is known. The words seem so fitting for such a time as this. One feels as if soft music should be playing in the background.

But hold on! Remember that screech sound that was made when the needle of a record player skittered across the record, almost like a zip sound or the rewind of the cassette player. Kids hear it, but have no idea where that sound originated, but those of us from the era of record and cassette players recognize the sound instantly.

Well, that would be the sound that might happen if the Apostle Paul, who wrote this letter to the Corinthians, heard what we have done to that passage. He would hit rewind and let us know what we had missed. Rather than being a passage that comes out of a beautiful love story, this passage was written to a community that was in conflict. Paul had been rebuking the community for its lack of care for one another and their oneness when it comes to bragging rights for who has the best and most important spiritual gifts. This was a fledgling Christian community that was not on the right track and Paul was going to let them know in no uncertain terms that their infighting and treatment of each other was not going to cut it.

Rather than a tone of beauty, I suspect Paul is using a much more challenging tone of voice. He wanted their attention and he wanted them to hear how far off the mark they were. So the line he uses and we read at the end of chapter 12 is, "I will show you a still more excellent way. And that is when the writing on how to love starts.

These people needed to know what Christian love really looks like and means. So Paul talks about the things, the gifts, that the Corinthians have been coveting. Gifts of the Spirit, that when understood correctly, are given in different measure to different people so that all gifts together can be used by the church to bring about a transformed experience of the world for ourselves and others. A world where respect, dignity, and the value of each individual is upheld.

Paul says to them, "<sup>1</sup><sup>3</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>And 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. <sup>3</sup>If 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."

He goes on to talk about love and the qualities of love and what love is not. As I read, note in the way Paul writes how love becomes an act of the will, it is a choice. Remember, he was writing to people who were in conflict with one another. This is not a romance.

Love is patient...

Love is kind...

Love is not envious...

Love is not boastful...

Love is not arrogant...

Love is not rude...

Love does not insist on its own way...

Love is not irritable...

Love is not resentful...

Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing...

Love rejoices in the truth...

Love bears all things...

Love believes all things...

Love hopes all things...

Love endures all things.

Now a caveat before we continue...this is not a love that means that you need to be a doormat for someone else. As much as this passage has been used for weddings it has also been used to bully people into staying in an abusive relationship and that just is not covered in this kind of love. God desires that all have abundant life, and anything that goes against that needs to be challenged. If the truth is that someone is abusive then you need to find your way to wholeness.

What Paul was challenging was oppressive and arrogant behavior, people thinking that they were better than others because they felt God had given them a more important and better gift of the spirit than another. Thing is, each of us is given gifts for the good of the whole community, especially the community of faith. Not everyone gets every gift. When taken together the gifts empower the whole of us, allowing us to do the work of church as the hands and feet of God for one another and in community. That of the church and beyond these walls to transform and bring abundant life to others.

The words we so often use at St. Andrew's of *Responding, Restoring, and Rejoicing* are about using our gifts as a community of people with various talents, abilities, and resources to impact lives so that all may live wholly and abundantly.

Paul continues to share that the only thing that never ends is love. All other gifts have an expiration date that comes in our lifetime or with our death. He writes...

<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 [when we are together with God] we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Paul then shares that there are three gifts that are available to everyone... faith, hope, and love. Everyone has access to these gifts. All of us can have faith, all can have hope, all can love. These gifts bring about the opposite of what was happening in Corinth. These are gifts that unify the community as followers of Jesus.

On Wednesday we have an interesting occurrence where Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday both land on February 14<sup>th</sup>. It is a day that will meld the romantic love of Valentine's Day with the sacrificial love of Christ that displayed the deep love of God for all humanity on a cross.

We can celebrate both. It is important to celebrate the deep love that we have for each other, it is also important to give thanks and reflect deeply on the great love of God in Christ that has given us the ability to have a relationship with God in beautiful and intimate ways while sharing that love with one another. A love that is rich and meaningful.

Paul concludes this portion of his letter with words that need to settle within us as individuals and as we seek to be the church in our own time, "And now faith hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." May those gifts of the Spirit be within each one of us.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

## Prayers of the People

Your love is patient;  
we give you thanks for all those who have been patient with us  
and have taught and cared for us;  
and we pray for the patience to love others  
as you have loved us.

Your love is kind;  
give us the courage to be kind to others  
and to serve those with patience  
who are so often unkind, rude, difficult to love, or our enemies.  
They are your children and our sisters and brothers  
and they were made in your image.

Your love is not pompous;  
give us insight to speak the truth in love  
and for the sake of your kingdom  
and not out of a need to appear clever or right  
and in all our relationships  
give us the wisdom to listen far more than we speak.

Your love does not seek its own interests;  
we thank you and pray for those who serve the poor and those in need,  
who give tirelessly of themselves and who have much to do  
and little time for themselves.

Your love is not quick-tempered;  
we pray for those who are angry  
and for the violent and their victims;  
for children who fear, elders who are abused,  
and people trapped in relationships that injure and harm.

Your love bears all things;  
we remember before you those with heavy burdens,  
many cares, much stress, and too little comfort and help.  
Open our eyes to those around us and their needs  
and give us the wisdom to offer help  
without any prying or sense of superiority.

Your love never fails;  
even death does not trespass on the breadth and depth of your love.  
We thank you for those we have loved in this life  
and who now dwell in the peace and joy of your presence  
and let your comfort settle on those who are bereaved  
or who are lonely this day.

~ posted on The Presbyterian Church in Canada website. <http://presbyterian.ca>

And now in the name of Jesus we pray as he taught

## Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen**

## Invitation to the offering

With thankfulness we give in gratitude and joy.  
With prayerfulness we give in sacrifice and love.  
With hopefulness we give in commitment to God.

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## Hymn

### *In loving partnership*

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1. In loving partnership we come,  
seeking, O God, your will to do.  
Our prayers and actions now receive;  
we freely offer them to you.
2. We are the hands and feet of Christ,  
serving by grace each other's need.  
We dare to risk and sacrifice  
with truthful word and faithful deed.
3. Loving community we seek;  
your hope and strength within us move.  
The poor and rich, the strong and weak  
are brought together in your love.
4. In loving partnership, O God,  
help us your future to proclaim.  
Justice and peace be our desire,  
we humbly pray in Jesus's name.

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## Benediction

May the love of God enfold us.  
**May the grace of God uphold us.**

May the power of God set us free  
**to love and serve all God's people.**

Now to God, who by the means of the power working in us  
is able to do so much more than we can ask or even think,  
to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all times,  
for ever and ever.

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