

**Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV**  
**Pastor Scott Trevithick**

Date: January 30, 2022, Yr. C Reconciling in Christ Sunday at LCGS

Text: 1 Corinthians 13 and Luke 4:21-30

Title: How Far Shall God's Love Extend?

Focus: God's love in Jesus extends to outsider and insider alike.

## **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

<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.

## **Luke 4:21-30**

<sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>22</sup>All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" <sup>23</sup>He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" <sup>24</sup>And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. <sup>25</sup>But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; <sup>26</sup>yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. <sup>27</sup>There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." <sup>28</sup>When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. <sup>29</sup>They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. <sup>30</sup>But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

## What is Love?

*“Hate crimes [in America] are on the rise, and yet 85% of Americans consider themselves unprejudiced.”<sup>1</sup>*

If both those things are true—hate crimes are increasing and yet 85% of Americans consider themselves not to be prejudiced, then how do you explain that? What is the correlation between the two?

There is a line from the ELCA social statement called **“Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture”** which sticks out to me and is imbedded in my memory:

- “Racism infects and affects everyone, with an impact that varies according to race, ethnicity, or culture, and other factors such as gender or economic situation.”<sup>2</sup>

That’s a partial explanation: It’s the assertion that all of us who grow up in this dominant white culture with its particular history are “infected and affected” by racism and the messages imbedded in our culture.

So, it’s a challenge to grow by asking ourselves, if we have a perception of ourselves and the motivations that compel us to action, how accurate is that self-awareness? Are there factors that influence us of which we’re less aware? To what degree are assumptions, stereotypes, and unintentional actions toward others based on their perceived differences or labels?

Keep those questions in mind as we check out this video. It was recorded in a public, outdoor setting at Santa Monica’s Third Street Promenade—an open-air shopping district with lots of people walking and browsing and hanging out.

- View video: **“Love Has No Labels”**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnDgZuGIhHs>

What do you think about that video? Does it offend you? Make you uncomfortable? Make you want to cheer? Maybe bring a tear to your eye?

This video was produced in 2015 by the Ad Council. The Ad Council is a nonprofit agency which brings together various creative partners from across media,

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<sup>1</sup> From the Ad Council “Diversity and Inclusion” page. <https://www.adcouncil.org/campaign/diversity-inclusion> See also Bias Motivation categories for 2020 from the Hate Crime Statistics of the U.S. Dept. of Justice. showing the percentage of bias motivation categories for victims of single-bias incidents in 2020. Race/Ethnicity/Ancestry: 61.8%; Sexual Orientation 20%; Religion 13.3%; Gender Identity 2.7%; Disability 1.4% and gender .7%  
<https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics#piechart-description>

<sup>2</sup> ELCA—“A Social Statement on Freed in Christ: Race Ethnicity, and Culture.” Adopted by a more than 2/3 majority vote as a social statement of the ELCA by the third Churchwide Assembly on August 31, 1993, at Kansas City, MO.  
[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/RaceSS.pdf?\\_ga=2.159668479.379081420.1643558869-747152401.1643558869](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/RaceSS.pdf?_ga=2.159668479.379081420.1643558869-747152401.1643558869)

tech, marketing, and advertising in the service of social good. Since they started in the 1940s, their campaigns have become a part of American culture. They're the ones who created

- Smokey Bear: "Only YOU can prevent forest fires!"
- The Peace Corps recruiting slogan "The Toughest Job You'll Ever Love"
- McGruff the Crime Dog: "Take a Bite Out of Crime"
- Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" anti-drug campaign in the 1980s
- The Crash Test Dummies Vince and Larry

This video called ***Skeletons*** is from their campaign called "Love Has No Labels." within their Diversity and Inclusion emphasis.

The aim of the campaign or what its creators want to accomplish. . .

- "Love Has No Labels is a movement to promote acceptance and inclusion of all people across race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age and ability." <sup>3</sup>

So, this was a product of a public service campaign. It's not a "church resource."

Let's think theologically about the content of this video:

- What do we think about who God is?
- How is God revealed in Scripture?
- How is God revealed in the person of Jesus?
- Who is humankind in light of what we say about God?
- What does that mean for how we relate to one another?

Then, to reflect on the content of the video: How do our theological views cohere with what's in the video? (Or vice versa?)

This is from the Ad Council. It's not a Christian resource, not a church resource. What is the message they want to get across and what do we think about that?

- Love has no gender
- Love has no race
- Love has no disability
- Love has no age
- Love has no religion

**Did you hear some of the reflections at the end? Maybe you have a favorite.**

- "That's my best friend!"
- "I love my sister."
- "Our family is no less than any other family."

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.adcouncil.org/campaign/diversity-inclusion>

This video debuted in 2015 on Upworthy's Facebook page. It was the second most viewed video of 2015. It won a **Shorty Award** in the “Social Good Campaign” category (in 2015). “The Shorty Awards honor the best people and organizations on Social media and digital.”<sup>4</sup>

I don't ever remember viewing it around that time. I learned of it because it is a resource that is a part of the *Boundless* curriculum to prepare high schoolers for the 2022 Youth Gathering. (Unit 1 on Boundless Love, written by Elizabeth Hood of Grace Lutheran, Palo Alto within our Sierra Pacific Synod.)<sup>5</sup>

## Thinking Theologically, continued. . .

Last week in the sermon we focused on 1 Corinthians 12. Paul is talking about the variety of gifts and how they are given by the Spirit for the common good or for the building up of the body of Christ.

We talked about how this church in Corinth was troubled by division.

- They had loyalties to different leaders
- There were practices that divided rich and poor
- There were divisions rooted in their racial ethnic heritage.
- Over and over throughout the letter, he talks about unity or being one.

We talked about how Paul used the metaphor of a human body and how all the parts or “members” work together to give us an image of how the Church should work together. We talked about healthy church communities and not so healthy church communities and how both pastors and regular worshipers are harmed in unhealthy places.

The close of the sermon noted that at the close of chapter 12, Paul gives us a hint of what he's going to talk about next in chapter 13:

<sup>31</sup>But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

That points us to today's reading from chapter 13 in which Paul says that all the cool stuff that the Corinthians may be thinking about or be able to do through their spiritual gifts—they apparently valued speaking in tongues above all other gifts and it became another reflection of their division. . . Paul says those gifts, whether it is speaking in tongues or interpreting or understanding things, or acts of devotion or generosity—they mean nothing if they're not done with love.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://shortyawards.com/8th/love-has-no-labels-diversity-inclusion-campaign#:~:text=The%20Ad%20Council%20launched%20the,raising%20awareness%20for%20implicit%20biases.>

<sup>5</sup> Download:

[https://download.elca.org/\\_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/GettingReady\\_2022\\_UNIT1.pdf&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1&\\_ga=2.38934435.1659651964.1643070365-1767971973.1643070365](https://download.elca.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/GettingReady_2022_UNIT1.pdf&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1&_ga=2.38934435.1659651964.1643070365-1767971973.1643070365)

## Love is a Verb. . .

Paul counters whatever tendencies we may have to define or limit love as a warm, fuzzy feeling. He's writing to people who were in conflict and would have a hard time feeling warm and fuzzy about each other or at least about some people in their midst. So, Paul's not writing in a Hallmark-style with flowery messages about a sentimental idea of love. Since he's been addressing their divisions throughout the letter and is well-aware of the tension among them about spiritual gifts, he's urging them to love one another in the midst of those differences and divisions. Paul would say that love is shown by what you do—it is intentional action.

Further emphasizing his point that love is not characterized by a feeling, but by something you do, he describes how love is demonstrated or what love compels you to do in verses 4-7. Most English translations fail to capture that in the Greek all these descriptors are **verbs** rather than adjectives.

Check this out from *The Message*, a contemporary translation, which expresses it with verbs.

Love never gives up.  
 Love cares more for others than for self.  
 Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.  
 Love doesn't strut,  
 Doesn't have a swelled head,  
 Doesn't force itself on others,  
 Isn't always "me first,"  
 Doesn't fly off the handle,  
 Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,  
 Doesn't revel when others grovel,  
 Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
 Puts up with anything,  
 Trusts God always,  
 Always looks for the best,  
 Never looks back,  
 But keeps going to the end.

Feeling the power of these *verbs*, these action words, helps us grasp that Paul is saying that love takes action, it's not a passive feeling toward another. The way Paul talks about love or his use of love as a verb and his emphasis on love as an action all point to love as the foundational ethic for the Church community—the way we should live and behave.

That point—that love is the root of how we should relate to one another—gets me back to the video and the creators' intent for it. Here's what it says on the website of the Ad Council about their hope for this video and the full campaign and the principle behind their efforts:

- “We believe love is the most powerful force to overcome bias. Together, we can create a more inclusive world.”<sup>6</sup>

To say “we believe” makes this statement like a *creed*. It’s like an affirmation of faith in the Church. They’re saying, “We believe love is the most powerful force in the world.” That sounds a lot like Paul saying that “Love is an action which has the power to overcome division.”

They’re not identifying *God* as the source of this love, which is what we would say, but I think their message is consistent with what we would say as people of God.

## Why Did they Become Angry with Jesus?

Let’s take a look at the gospel passage from Luke. Like the Epistle reading of 1 Corinthians 13 that followed last week’s 1 Corinthians 12 reading, this gospel passage today immediately follows what we read last week.

Jesus is back in his hometown of Nazareth and has been teaching and talking in the synagogue. He has just read from the scroll of Isaiah which describes a messiah (someone who is anointed) whose job would be to bring good news to the poor, freedom to the captives, healing to folks with disabilities and proclamations of the year of the Lord’s favor. Jesus sat down to teach and announced that the Scripture had been fulfilled in the hearing of that congregation. Jesus announces himself as a (possibly *the*) messiah in his hometown.

Jesus announced that he was anointed for God’s work, and people are fine with that. The text says, “all the people spoke well of him and were amazed at his gracious words.” They affirmed, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” (Luke 4:22). The congregation in Nazareth was simply pleased that one of their own spoke gracious words about his anointing for service. They believed what Jesus said about himself and were happy to hear it.

But then Jesus continues, and the response of the people turns rapidly and dramatically. As we look at what changed, maybe that’s a place where we can think about our responses to the “Love has no labels” video.

- Why are the people responding differently to Jesus as this conversation continues?

Jesus references the widow at Zarephath and the leper Naaman, who was a commander in the army of the Syrian king. Syria was the dominant power in the region and would have been feared by Israel. He was pointing out to them that in their shared history, God had come to these particular people, a widow and army leader of this regional power whom they feared.

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<sup>6</sup> From the “Diversity and Inclusion” page of the Ad Council.  
<https://www.adcouncil.org/campaign/diversity-inclusion>

By pointing out how God had been present with this widow and this leper through the prophets Elisha and Elijah, and by identifying with them, **Jesus was saying that he, too, has come for the widows and the lepers and the outsiders. Jesus has come for everyone.**

So, in this very short exchange, the people have turned from pleasant recognition of Jesus as they speak well of him and were amazed at his gracious words to being enraged that he was saying that God's love could envelop these outsiders as well.

So, in the end, if we think of ourselves as "insiders," as those whom God loves, then maybe we have to consider that those whom we perceive to be different or on the outside are the very ones whom Jesus says he has come to show God's love.

What does the video say? What does Paul say? What might we say?

We believe that love has no labels. We believe that God's love is the most powerful force to overcome division. We believe Jesus has come for outsider and insider alike.

Thanks be to God for a love like that.