

AUGUST 17, 2025

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SERMON August 10 - 'Shining a Light: Love' 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Hebrews 12:4-11

This week we finish the last color in the spectrum of light that has inspired the series for the last weeks. Each color represents an energy connected to an emotion or character trait. That energy can be used for many purposes, most notable offense and defense. The strength of the use of the energy is tied to the strength of the trait or emotion in the one who is wielding it.

The last color is violet, which represents love. On one hand, love is one of the most powerful feelings we can experience. That said, love that isn't understood within certain sensibilities can run wild. Love can quickly turn to hate if it's rejected. Unloving things have been and are still done in the name of love when other aspects of our understanding are out of whack.

Biblically, love is central to our faith. God is love. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." "Love God and love your neighbor." "If I do not have love I have nothing." "Anyone who says they love God but hate their fellow human is a liar." "No one has greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."

If we don't have love we don't have Christ.

It's widely understood that there are many kinds of love. There are different Greek words people like to toss around to make the point, but even the ones used Biblically are limited. We love people. But there are many different ways we love depending on whom. Family, friend, co-worker, spouse, just the general love for humanity that is to be extended to everyone. We love causes and passions that we pursue. We love animals and nature. We love God. All of these are legitimate and each unique.

What is important about all of them is that love in its most honest form is an intention and a choice, not just a feeling.

Love as we think about it is some degree of affection. It conjures up warm fuzzy feelings. It conjures up devotion and desire. Sometimes it can almost feel compulsive.

What about when that feeling isn't present?

Emotion is beautiful and wonderful, however if our relationships with anyone or anything are defined by emotion we are in trouble. Why? Because I don't always feel loving.

If I am ruled by my emotions, everything is tentative to how I'm feeling in a given moment. There is a lot of faith nowadays that is rooted in emotion. I like a worship style or experience because of how it makes me feel. What happens when that feeling isn't there?

If my faith is ruled by emotion, it won't be faithful very long. There are too many urges, desires, and feelings that would push me the exact opposite direction of Christ. If that's how I roll, I act however my feeling directs me through the week and then go get my "feel good fix" in church so I can tell myself that I'm forgiven and all is good. Then I'm back to my emotion driven life.

That isn't faith. It's convenience that makes me feel better about myself without having to do any of the real work of reigning myself in to intentionally allowing God to be my guide rather than my feelings.

It's the same with love. It's a choice.

I love Em. I absolutely do. But sometimes she ticks me off, and sometimes I tick her off. I love her, but sometimes I don't necessarily like her. Even if I like her and there's nothing between the two of us, depending on whatever else life is throwing at me I might not feel all warm and fuzzy and gushing.

In all of those moments I have to make a choice about whether I will still act loving towards her. We're having a blip. Do I still open her car door for her? I know the dishes need done and it's an irritant to her when they aren't. Do I do them or ignore them because I know it will tick her off? She's working late, do I make sure I make enough dinner for her as well as the rest of us or let her " fend for herself?"

Love makes the choice. Love is intentional even when we don't feel like it.

Let's look at the famous love chapter in scripture. 1 Corinthians 13.

If I speak in the tongues[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient= how often do we want to be patient? Even when we are feeling fuzzy this isn't easy. If you've

ever been running late and can feel the fingers of your partner tapping in their mind, yet they wait with grace you know about this. It's a choice.

Love is kind- Many times, especially with folks we may never see again this can be difficult if the mood is foul and we're receiving bad behavior. Do we choose kindness?

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.= Sometimes we feel full of ourselves. Do we value the heart of the other enough to stay humble?

5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered- so many times people do things that feel like they deserve disrespect. We live in a world that tells us to put ourselves first. We have legitimate anger- Do we choose to keep ourselves controlled, modest, and put others first?

It keeps no record of wrongs- It's easy to dredge up the past in a fight. Do we make the choice to let bygones be bygones? The surest way to keep someone from growing is to keep reminding them of their past mistakes.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth- sometimes we benefit from evil and truth is inconvenient. Do we make the choice to pursue truth even when it hurts?

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres- Each of these requires us to choose to be vulnerable and risk some form of injury. It's easier to cover up and protect ourselves. To not requires intentional decision.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love- Why is love greatest? Because it is not just rooted in intention, it is rooted in action. Faith and hope meet most powerfully when they are expressed through the action of intentional love.

All of this others first, have grace and patience to many today seems too soft. They see empathy as weakness. It isn't.

Love is also accountable. This is the sense of discipline. But let's be clear about it because God's discipline might not look like what you think it does.

If God is just and fair in addition to loving then it would make sense that every act of discipline, or some might like the term punishment better, would be consistent across the board. Otherwise it's chaos. How do we know what's wrong and right if there isn't any consistency in discipline?

We know this doesn't happen. In fact it's why as the Old Testament period moved on and the period came between Old and New Testaments people rethought their sense of the afterlife. Through most of the Old Testament the afterlife was everyone going to the same land of the dead. There was no sense of reward and punishment. In the New Testament that notion is very different and with very good reason.

In the Psalms often we see the unfairness of life in laments. The righteous are harmed and oppressed while the wicked seem to thrive and do well. How does this figure? Shouldn't the wicked be getting smitings and spankings?

As they sought God their faith and understanding grew. Experience taught them that life is wildly unfair. Yet God who is loving and just would make things right. If not in this life, then in the next. Clearly there is consequence and reward. This life will be reckoned in the next.

The point here is that too often "love" gets used as a tool for harsh punishment and correction. And it's done in the name of God. "God disciplines, God hammers punishment, and therefore we should as well to get people into line."

Correction absolutely is part of love. No question. Consequences are as well. Hebrews reminds us that our human parents know enough that we need correction, we need discipline. Hopefully that correction is truly loving, consistent, fair, and appropriate to whatever behavior needs addressed.

As we've noted however, smitings from on high don't seem to be frequent, nor are they consistent in any fashion. So what is God's loving discipline?

Discipline is simply bringing things into line. In faith it's bringing life into line with Christ. If everything were always perfect there would be no trouble living faithfully. No discomfort. Everything works out for us. Awesome. That doesn't produce strength of faith or character. At graveside services we hear these words "though now for a little while you suffer trials so that the genuineness of your faith may prove itself worthy at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Hebrews says that we endure hardship as discipline. If we want to be honest, this isn't necessary for God to whammy us with. The world and life around us makes for plenty of hardship, challenge, frustration, and more that gives us opportunity to prove the genuineness of our faith. That proves the genuineness of our love. Many situations we bring on ourselves through poor choices. How do we handle the consequences?

Going back to 1 Corinthians, the simply course of dealing with life and life's natural flow of challenges both good and bad disciplines us and reveals our love. We have chance after chance to choose how to manage the circumstances and relationships in which we find ourselves.

Do we extend the same love we hope to receive from others? Do we choose patience, kindness, humility, forgiveness, and so on?

Here's the beauty in all of this. We're told that love never fails. Why? Because love imitates Christ and ultimately Christ is victorious. Love gives peace of mind and heart. Love demonstrates for the world the answer to all of its woes. Love grows us even as we try to grow those around us into a life worthy of being called Christian.

Love is the location of the promises of God. It is the promise of redemption here and down the road. It is the doorway to living into the Kingdom of God now so we don't have to worry about where we'll find ourselves when this life passes to eternity.