

MEDDLIN'
1 Corinthians 13
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church
June 25, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

More than once in my career,
I have been accused of meddling
in the lives of the people of the congregation.

In East Texas they used to say:
“He done stopped preachin’ and gone to meddlin’.

Well, the seat belt sign is on,
please do not wander around the sanctuary
And don’t throw things at me, either.

ILLUSTRATION:

Let’s begin with an illustration.

The Church in Corinth was struggling -
- there was a lot of competition among the members -
- people claiming superiority over others
based on their spiritual gifts.

And in that struggle, tempers were flaring
and folks were beginning to mistreat each other.

Certain issues had arisen in the Church
and the folks were divided in their views
and they were jockeying for positions of power and influence.

So Paul sits down and writes them a letter -

- a letter to explain the role of spiritual gifts
and how they are to be used in the church.

Within that letter,
we find the nugget we are examining today - love.

If Paul were to try to give you an illustration
of what he is saying to the church in Corinth,
he might use this one.

It was the coldest winter ever.
Many animals had died because of the cold.

A group of porcupines,
realizing the hazardous situation they faced,
decided to group together to keep warm.

It was a good idea . . . at first.
By grouping together,
they covered and protected themselves;
but the quills of each one wounded their closest companions.

After a while, they decided to reduce the pain and discomfort
by distancing themselves one from the other
and they began to die, alone and frozen.

So they had to make a choice:
either accept the quills of their companions
or freeze to death and disappear from the Earth.

Wisely, they decided to huddle closely back together.
They learned to live with the little wounds

caused by the close relationship with their companions
in order to capture the heat that came from the others.

In this way they were able to survive.

The moral of this illustration is simple:

The best relationship is not the one that brings together perfect people,
but when each individual learns to live with the imperfections of
others
and can admire the other person's good qualities.

Some might call this tolerance,
perhaps it could be called charity.
Paul would say it is love.

APPLICATION:

For Paul, at least in this context,
love is an *action*; not an emotion.
And Paul is calling the Corinthian Church -
- and all Christians -
- to *act* in a loving manner.

Can I tell you something you already know?

There are some warm and cuddly creatures in this Church -
- and . . . there are some porcupines.
And maybe even a skunk or two.

There's a sign just on the outskirts of Dumas, Texas.
It says: Welcome to Dumas . . .
. . . 14,000 folks and a few ole soreheads.

That pretty well describes the Church at Corinth . . .
. . . and just about every Church I have served.

Maybe even this Church.

The Church is made up of imperfect people -
- people who are called by God into covenant with each other
for the purpose of *acting* in love to the world
and to each other.

Now, I'm going to meddle in your business.

At some point, we are going to have to get beyond
whether we are Democrats or Republicans
and all the political baggage that attaches to that.

How someone votes - or voted - is a personal matter.
It is OK to protest certain actions of the government
but it is certainly not Ok to destroy property
or cause harm to other people!
That has to stop!

OK . . . you can relax a little.
That was my public service announcement for the day.
It needed to be said . . . I said it . . . let's move on.

THE CHURCH'S FUTURE

Let's talk about more practical matters.

This Church - and each of us - faces an unknown future;
and that may be causing some stress
and it may begin to strain a relationship or two.

There are some tough decisions ahead of us . . .
. . . decisions that are going to be positional issues -
- where we agree on the goal but not how to achieve it.

. . . there will also be some status issues -
- where we do not agree on the goal or outcome.

When - not if - when that happens,
we have to make some decisions about how we - personally -
- are going to act.

There are going to be moments
when we are tempted to become sounding gongs,
or clashing cymbals . . .
. . . raising our voices in order to gain an advantage over each other.

In those moments,
remember what Paul said:
No matter how persuasive your argument might be
if you are not acting out of love,
you are just making noise - useless noise,
offensive noise.

In the words of Shakespeare - Macbeth
we become “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

If you think you have a superior opinion
based upon superior knowledge or superior faith
and it lacks love . . .
. . . it is worthless to the rest of us.

We are going to have to work hard to find a way
to get along with each other
as we face and make the decisions
concerning the future of this Church.

And through it all,

we have to *act* in a loving manner towards everyone involved.

MEDDLING:

OK . . . here's where I quit preachin' and go to meddlin' again
so hang on and don't throw hymnals at me.

This church will not survive

if we do not work together - *acting in love* -
to keep peace, harmony and love towards one another.

That's a prophecy you can take to the bank!
Imagine what we can accomplish together
if we put the effort into loving one another!

Oh, there are some folks here that are hard to love.
I may be one of those.

But if we recognize we are all children of God,
then the differences that separate us -
- the positional issues - the status issues -
- become secondary and not nearly as important.

If we concentrated on what we share
rather than what separates us . . .
. . . we become a people who are doing their best
to follow God's will.

Our mission statement says:
we are to "proclaim and demonstrate God's love" . . .
. . . it would be hypocritical of us to do that
if we didn't first love each other.

So, here's what I am saying.
We are faced with making a decision whether to continue

yoked with First Presbyterian downtown.

That's a very tough decision,
and we may not get the opportunity to make that decision
if First Presbyterian decides to separate from us.

Whatever they decide, don't get caught up in turmoil!
Don't be a gong or a cymbal!

If their decision is to remain yoked with us,
then this congregation will have to make the decision
whether or not we want to be yoked with them.

And that could be a source of dissension among us.
The decision and final result
may not be the result we think is best.
Don't be a gong or a cymbal!

Then we have to decide what we want to see in our next pastor -
what we think are the most important attributes,
what we think the pastor's primary duties should be.
Again, a potential cause of dissension.
Don't be a gong or a cymbal!

CONCLUSION:

Often - almost always - when I perform a wedding,
I include a portion of 1 Corinthians 13 in the ceremony.

I believe it is critical to a marriage
to treat each other with dignity, charity and love.

If couples cannot be patient with one another,
if they cannot treat each other with kindness,
if they cannot put away childish behavior
like envy, boasting, pride, name-calling and blame

the marriage will not be the source of strength and joy
that God meant for it to be.

If one or both couples keep a record of wrongs,
and throw it up to one another when they disagree,
if they use the past as a weapon
to gain an advantage over the other person,
they are sacrificing their future together.

If, instead, the couple seeks to build each other up,
to trust each other
to hope together for the future
and persevere in the face of hard times
then that union will be blessed by God
because it rests upon the foundation of love.

My beloved brothers and sisters,
when we joined this church,
we entered into a covenant relationship with each other.

Not unlike that of a marriage.

And like a marriage,
we must work from a foundation built upon love.

Even now, God is preparing a glorious future for us.
We must believe that with all our hearts . . .
. . . and we must bond together in love to welcome that future

When we act in loving ways towards each other -
- and those we live among -
- then not only are we fulfilling the mission of this Church -
- we are honoring God.

And I promise you, when we honor God - God honors us!
May God bless us with a glorious future!