

## Love Lessons

On Sunday, we celebrated the ordination of Pastor Vivian and she shared the message, an exposition of the great love chapter, I Corinthians 13.

1. Warm-up Question: What word comes to mind to describe how you felt as we celebrated Pastor Vivian's ordination on Sunday? Tell us why you choose that word.
2. Vivian began her sermon by harkening back to when she first came to us in 2009 as a Pastoral Intern during seminary. On her first day, she found herself wondering how we would react to her and whether we live up to what we claim to be as a church.
  - a. We claim to be a church where "you will be treated as an adult to work out your relationship with God." Do you think we are living up to that value? Is it important to you to be in a church like that? Why or why not?
  - b. We claim to be a church that welcomes all people. Vivian came to us before we had many straight congregants. She found herself in a sea of gays and lesbians. She wondered whether, as a straight woman, she would be truly welcome. Her unspoken question was, "Are all mean 'all' or just 'all who look like them?'" Do you think we are living up to the value that ALL are welcome? Is it important to you to be in a church like that? Why or why not?
  - c. The first person Vivian saw on her first Sunday was someone "dressed in a blouse, skirt, hose, and heels, [with] a beard and bald head." Vivian thought, "God, I don't know what to do." She heard God say, "All you have to do is love." So she walked up and introduced herself. The other person said, "My name is Larry, but sometimes they call me Allison." With that, Vivian fell in love with our church. How does it make you feel to belong to a church that welcomes Larry/ Allison? How can we do even better at welcoming transgender congregants?
3. In the abstract, it seems easy and intuitive to "love the world." The problem is . . . the world is full of real people who are very fallible. As Lucy said to Charlie Brown, "Look, Blockhead, the world I love. It's people I can't stand." So in I Corinthians 13 God challenges us to step up our game by giving us a detailed biblical definition of love. Although this definition is often read at weddings, Paul wasn't specifically speaking to married couples. He was speaking to the congregation of the Church at Corinth. People in the congregation at Corinth were arguing and competing with one another for status. So Paul challenged them. Read I Corinthians 13:1-7, 13.
  - a. Verses 1-3 make the point that no matter how gifted we are, without love we're nothing. Paul says it's possible to speak in the tongues of angels or be a prophet or receive revelations from God or give all your possessions to the poor or become a martyr, but still be nothing in God's eyes because we do not love. Have

you ever known someone who was very gifted, but not very loving? How did they impact you? Did they seem happy?

- b. Have you ever known someone who had limited gifts, but great love? How did they impact you? Did they seem happy?
  - c. Verses 4-7 identify the primary characteristics of genuine love. Take a look at those characteristics (listed on p. 3). Which one comes easiest to you? Why does it come easy to you?
  - d. Which one needs the most work in your life? Why is that characteristic so hard for you?
  - e. Liane Moriarty wrote, “They say it’s good to let your grudges go, but I don’t know. I’m quite found of my grudge. I tend it like a little pet.” Who is someone you hold a grudge against? Why is it so hard to let go?
  - f. The German word *schadenfreude* means “taking pleasure in the misfortune of others.” Do you ever secretly find yourself taking delight in someone’s misfortune – maybe someone you personally know or someone who’s famous? Where does that *schadenfreude* impulse come from? Why is it so easy to fall into the trap?
  - g. Chaka Khan said, “Through the fire . . . to the limit . . . to the wall.” Her words seem to capture the essence of what verse 7 means when it says, “Love always perseveres.” When in your life have you applied that attitude to a relationship? What happened?
4. Since God is love, Vivian suggested we can get a more accurate picture of how God interacts with us by substituting “God” for “love” each place it occurs in I Corinthians 13. See the second list on p. 3. As you review this list, which phrase most challenges you to see God in a new or deeper way?
  5. Vivian closed her sermon with three practical suggestions to help us do better. First, be patient with yourself and others. Second, be humble and listen to others with an open heart. Third, be courageous enough to dare to take the risk to love others the way I Corinthians 13 suggests.

Is God laying someone on your heart that you need to risk loving more like I Corinthians 13 says we should? If so, what would it look like to try to love that person better? Which of the characteristics of love most need to be applied to that situation? Are you ready to take the risk?

## **Characteristics of Genuine Love (I Corinthians 13)**

- ✓ Love is longsuffering toward others.
- ✓ Love does not covet what others have.
- ✓ Love does not grasp for power.
- ✓ Love is not rude.
- ✓ Love does not demand its own way.
- ✓ Love is not touchy.
- ✓ Love does not keep a record of grudges.
- ✓ Love does not delight in the misfortunes of others.
- ✓ Love covers and protects others.
- ✓ Love believes the best about others.
- ✓ Love does not say, "It will be this way forever or get worse."
- ✓ Love holds its position at all cost, even death.

## **Characteristics of God (I Corinthians 13)**

- ✓ God is longsuffering toward you.
- ✓ God does not covet what you have.
- ✓ God does not grasp for power.
- ✓ God is not rude.
- ✓ God does not demand God's own way.
- ✓ God is not touchy.
- ✓ God does not keep a record of grudges.
- ✓ God does not delight in your misfortune.
- ✓ God covers and protects you.
- ✓ God believes the best about you.
- ✓ God does not say, "You will be this way forever or get worse."
- ✓ God holds onto love for you at all cost, even death.