



Expecting to Be Leaders: Leading as Loving

TEXT
1 Corinthians 13

August 19, 2018 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Y. Nishioka

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. 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. 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.

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

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. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 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. 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. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

It is one of the most well-known and well-liked passages of the Apostle Paul's writings. These verses frequently appear at weddings and renewals of wedding vows. And why not? The definition of love is beautiful.

But this passage was not written for a couple professing their love for one another. These words were not written for two people standing before God and their family and friends committing themselves to one another.

This passage was written to the young church in Corinth — a church that was in great conflict. They were fighting ... over everything. They were fighting about who could be in the church and who could not. They were fighting about Jewish practices and Gentile practices. They were fighting over roles in marriage and over sex and sexual immorality. They were even fighting over the church supper. Some of the more privileged people would arrive early and eat all the best food, and those who had to work late came later and there was hardly anything left. They were fighting so much they were

suing each other in civil courts. And they were fighting over leadership. I believe that this passage, often called the love chapter, is actually about how one leads in a church that is not getting along.

At the start of the chapter, there are three types of leaders named.

First, the upfront leader: The Apostle Paul writes, "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels ..." This is the leader who is the public speaker, the emcee. She is the director, the one in charge. This is the eloquent presenter, dare I say the preacher. This is the elected official; the CEO, chief executive officer. This is the kind of person that most think about when they think of a leader.

Second, the behind-the-scenes leader: Paul writes, "If I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and have all faith ..." This is the discerning leader. He works best behind-the-scenes; the manager or administrator. This person pays attention to details like the budget and logistics; the COO, the chief operating officer.

Third, the caregiving leader: Paul writes, "If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand

over my body so that I may boast ...” This is the sacrificial leader, the ultimate caregiver. Often reluctant to be up front and not the best with details or logistics, this leader is critical for the morale and strength of the group as a whole and individuals in the group. I would call this person the CFO — not the Chief Financial Officer, but the Chief Feeling Officer.

For these and any other type of leader, Paul is clear. All leading must come from love. If you are a great upfront leader, behind-the-scenes leader, caregiving leader, but you do not do this from love, it is all a waste.

When I was in high school at the Japanese Presbyterian Church in Seattle, the congregation sent two of us to the national Presbyterian Youth Triennium, a gathering of over 3,000 Presbyterian young people from across the country. The conference took place at Indiana University in Bloomington in July. Coming from Seattle, we had never experienced the heat and humidity of Indiana in July. We wondered why is the air “squishy”?

Our dorms were not air-conditioned, so we could not fall asleep until it was cool enough — and by then it was almost time to get up. The only cool place was the auditorium where we had worship. Picture it. Over 3,000 young people, most of whom had not slept the previous night. We go into an air-conditioned music hall with plush velvet seats; and when worship starts, they turn down the lights. You guessed it. We all fell asleep. It was the best sleep of the week.

I do not remember any of the preachers that week except one. It was Wednesday, and the planners had invited all of the moderators and stated clerks of the five sponsoring Presbyterian denominations to speak. The lights went down, the curtain went up, and there were nine older men on the platform. We thought to ourselves sarcastically, “This is going to be great,” and we all fell promptly asleep. Each of them spoke for a few minutes.

Then about an hour later, a young woman who was our age got up on the stage and asked each of these leaders a question: How do young people get power in the church? Well, this was interesting. As I remember, each of the first speakers did not say anything of substance. They were more condescending and patronizing.

Then the last speaker came up. His name was the Rev. Dr. James Andrews, the stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. He looked at over 3,000 young people and said, “The way you get power in the church of Jesus Christ is to do three things: the running of risks, long hours of toil, and menial chores. And quite frankly, looking out at this hall, I would doubt if there are more than 50 of you who are willing to go to the trouble.” Then he sat down.

The young woman, to her credit, asked Dr. Andrews to clarify his comment. “Excuse me,” she said. “But Dr. Andrews, would you please repeat what you said because I do believe you insulted us.” James Andrews smiled and came back to the po-

dium and said, “You heard me. The Church of Jesus Christ is not short of people who want power. The Church of Jesus Christ is short of people who are willing to love enough to lead.”

Today I conclude a preaching series titled “Great Expectations,” based on the four expectations given to us in our new strategic framework. Three weeks ago, I preached about how we expect to be invitational — meaning we do not just sit back and wait for people to come to us; we invite them. Two weeks ago, I preached about being magnetic. We hope that all we do as the body of Christ would be done well and with intention, and we welcome differences because that is how magnets attract. Last week, I preached about being formational. We expect to grow — to be formed more and more into Christ’s likeness. Finally, we are talking today about “Expecting to Be Leaders.” No matter what type of leader you are called to be, the Apostle reminds us it must all come from love.

Sadly, too many of the examples of leadership that we see today in government and business and even the church stand in direct contrast to this kind of love. The distorted message says that to lead is all about gaining power and control at the expense of others. It is about naming others as enemies and vilifying and punishing them and retaliating against them and holding grudges and keeping score. Leaders are not supposed to be consumed by the love of power. Leaders are supposed to be consumed by the power of love.

Leading is about loving. Love that is patient and kind. It is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. The love of Jesus bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. The love of God never ends.

When we lead from love, we are changed. The world is changed.

When I was a professor at Columbia Seminary, one of my students, Courtney, had to do a full semester of clinical pastoral education. This is when a student is assigned to be a chaplain, often in a hospital, full time for a semester. At the start of her second year in seminary, Courtney had taken two pastoral care classes.

Courtney is a petite, young, blond woman. She was assigned to Grady Memorial Hospital in downtown Atlanta. This is the largest public hospital in the state of Georgia. Miracles happen there every day. But it is a tough place to serve as a chaplain. It is a tough place to work as a physician or nurse or staff person. It is a hard place to be a patient.

She went through three days of orientation and then, on her first official day as a hospital student chaplain, she walked into a room on the first floor assigned to her. There was a handsome older African-American gentleman sitting next to a beautiful older African-American woman. She was smiling. He was not. They were holding hands.

She cleared her throat and said, "Hello, my name is Courtney, and I am one of the chaplains here. May I visit with you for a few minutes?" which is just what she had been trained to say. The man looked at her and said coldly, "Little girl, this is my wife of 63 years. She is the love of my life. She has the Alzheimer's and two weeks ago she stopped recognizing me. She doesn't even know who I am. If you can tell me how God is in this, then you can stay. If you can't, I just prefer you move on."

I asked her what she wanted to do, and she told me she desperately wanted to leave, but her legs would not move. She could not think of anything to say. She felt completely worthless. Then she looked at the gentleman, and she could see how much he loved his wife, and she thought about her grandparents and how much they loved each other. Then, she could not help it, and she started to cry. She just stood there looking down crying, watching her tears fall to the floor.

Then she looked up and saw that the man was crying, too. And then he reached out his hand and said to her, "Pastor, I would be honored if you would stay." And then her legs moved. And she sat down next to him, and she just held his hand and the hand of his beautiful wife who was still smiling, and she just cried with them every day they were in the hospital and then continued to visit them in their home until she died.

As a senior at Columbia Seminary, Courtney led her first

service of witness to the resurrection. At the funeral, she spoke to the husband and told him, "You know she is in God's arms and she remembers everything now, and she knows who you are. You know that, right?"

"Yes, pastor, I know," her husband said.

Running of risks ... long hours of toil ... menial chores ... upfront leader ... behind-the-scenes leader ... caregiving leader. It all must come from love — love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things, for this kind of love is the love of God, and God's love never ends.

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.