

“The Light of Grace: Love (Mary)”

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

If I speak in the tongues 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, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is Love.

Luke 1: 46-55, 2: 4-7, 19, 34-35

46 And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is His name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as He promised our ancestors.”

2: 4-7, 19, 34-35 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling

and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Learn Obedience Virgin Expectation

Today we are going to do what we call an acrostic, which means that we are going to take the four letters of the word “Love” and make four words that start with those letters to learn about how the love of God works and how our response to His love flows from God the Holy Spirit. [NOTE 1]

First I would imagine that most of you know this story but there may be a few of you who have never heard it or maybe you are just a little fuzzy on the details. Mary was a young lady who was chosen by God, one, because she was from the tribe of Judah and, two, well, because He chose her. Mary’s main qualification was that God chose her. But it does say that she was righteous and from the way she reacted to the angel we can see that she was willing to listen, humble, and she reacted in faith! In other words, the only qualification was that she was born in the right place, to the right people, at just the right time and God chose her.

As the Lord chose her, He also prepared her for what was about to take place. He sent the angel Gabriel to tell her all about it. Of course, she was greatly troubled at what the angel said, but Gabriel calmed her fears and continued to explain to her all that was about to take place.

This is where the first letter of the word “LOVE” comes in. The word that we are using for the letter “L” is “Learn”. Mary first had to learn all about God’s plan for her life. As she learned and as she grew in the knowledge that God was in control, she grew more calm and comfortable with it all. It might not have all made sense to her, as it really does go above and beyond anyone’s comprehension, but she now knew that the child to be conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit.

In our own lives we can have a learning experience like this as well, although it is probably not as direct or dramatic as Mary’s experience was. I mean there has only been one virgin birth, so you can rest assured that is not an option. As we live our lives, though, there are times when God takes control and uses us for His glory and His purpose. Usually, as it was for Mary, it is something outside our control, and we are really simply God’s instrument. He uses our hands, our feet, our mouths and our hearts to accomplish His purpose. I am the last person to propose to limit God, I mean, I fully believe that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present. But in most cases God chooses to use people that are FAT. Faithful, Available, and Teachable! Another acrostic. In Mary’s case, God made use of her womb, where the Baby Jesus would grow and develop by the power of the Holy Spirit and then be born to her on that first Christmas for the salvation of the whole world.

The second letter, the letter “O”, stands for “Obedience.” Now you might think that Mary was such an upstanding and righteous person that she obeyed all on her own. Here’s the deal with that, though. She had no choice. God was going to do in her what

He wanted to do, and she could either go along with it or fight against it, like Jonah tried to do, but either way, it was going to happen. Mary was just a regular teenage girl that the Holy Spirit used to do God's will. She was obedient, because she had faith and was faithful, available and teachable. On top of that, the Holy Spirit strengthened her unto obedience. She listened and did what the Lord told her, because it was the Lord's will for it to be so.

It is no different for us. We can either fight against God every step of the way, in which case God will use our disobedience, failures and disappointments to do his will, or we can be obedient to Him and go along for the ride as He does some amazing things through us that we'd never expect. **[NOTE 2]**

It is at this point, I would like to deviate from our acrostic to talk a little more in depth about love, especially the kind of love that the Bible talks about. First we have to understand that Love is a choice. Listen to these words of Jesus to His disciples not too long before He would be arrested, put on trial, beaten, tortured, and killed, then put in a tomb from which He was resurrected three days later: "A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By THIS everyone will know that you are my disciples... If you love one another (John chap.13)

Love is God. In 1 John chapter 4 and verse 16 we read, "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."

Love is a command, love is a choice, love is God. Love is the proof, the deed, the action that proves to others that we are Christians, fellow Christ-followers. At the end of 1 John 4 it reads, "If we say we love God yet hate a brother or sister, we are liars." You can not do both; love God and hate a brother or sister in Christ. Let me tell you a lie that most people try to believe: Hate is an emotion that we just can't help. Hate is a feeling we cannot resist. We have no choice but to hate. It is a lie, but a lie that many people believe. People prefer to believe this lie in order to excuse their hatred. But we all have a choice. We can choose to hate just as we choose to love. Oh, I know that there are people out there who believe that love is something you fall into like you fall in a hole, but it just ain't so. There are people who think that love is primarily an emotion, a feeling, a stirring in the loins of some kind, but that isn't the truth either. The people that think like that are the ones whose marriages last for just a few months because they simply fell out of love. Make no mistake, love is a matter of the will—something we decide to do. Love is a choice. Gary Smalley has a video curriculum and a book on that topic alone. No matter what somebody does to you, you ALWAYS have the choice to love them. Victor Frankl watched people amidst the most terrible conditions you can imagine in a Nazi deathcamp choose to be joyful. If love were not a choice, then God would not have commanded us to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength or to love our neighbor as ourself. If love was not a choice, then Jesus would not have commanded His followers to love one another. If love was NOT a choice there would be no need for a command! That make sense?

[NOTE 3] Okay, so love is a command. What does it look like to love one another as Jesus has loved us? Well, first we need to realize that people should not need to earn our love. Jesus loved His disciples and He loves you and me, and He loves the stranger or foreigner whether they deserve it or not! When Jesus gave the “new command” He did not say anything like, “if your brother treats you exceptionally well you should love him.” He simply said, “Love one another as I have loved you.” As I read the gospels, I see no instance where Jesus gave love conditionally, meaning that He withheld love if the condition were not met or waited to show love until a certain condition was met.

The very word that Jesus uses in this passage is Agape`. The Greek word Agape refers to an unconditional, sacrificial, and deep and strong love. That is the kind of love that we are supposed to have for one another.

Then Jesus went on to say that if we love one another, then all people will know that we are fellow Christ-followers. Right there you have the first church growth strategy! Love one another and the whole world will know that you are fellow Christ-followers, if you love one another. Over 100 years later it was written, “See how they love one another, how ready they are to die for one another.” It was an observation that was written about Christians 1900 years ago. [NOTE 4]

One more thing about the command to love. Every so often we would do well to put our names in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and verses 4 through 7. I want you to look up at the screen and put your name in every one of the spaces as we all read this out loud. So, we will be reading in unison at some points but it will sound jumbled as everyone pronounces their own name in the space. We will go slow because some people have one syllable names like Rick while others have three syllable names like Damaris. Let’s try it. **(READ in unison)** If you could read that and not cringe at any point, you know that you are doing well. If you cringed, coughed, or even cried and had to stop, you need to confess, repent, and receive God’s forgiveness as recorded in 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” [NOTE 5]

The third letter is “V” for “Virgin.” That word means that Mary had not had any intimate moments of love with a man. Mary and Joseph were not even married when the baby Jesus started growing inside her. Mary’s state as a virgin meant that it was God’s power that was at work in her by the Holy Spirit, not the actions of any human. This means that Jesus was born without sin as he was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

The last letter in the word “LOVE” is “E,” which for this message stands for “Expectation.” After everything was said and done, all Mary could do was wait in eager expectation. Can you imagine the excitement, the nervousness and the wonder that Mary went through? Maybe that’s why she went away for a few months to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, so that she could have some time to think about things and let that most blessed baby ever born grow in her womb.

We also wait in eager expectation for the Son of God to come again. As we are only a few days away, let us ponder with excitement and joy all that the Lord has done and will do for us.

We know that He is coming again, but let us learn anew what that means for us as we live our lives in this world. Let us be obedient to His callings in our lives so that He may extend and grow His Kingdom through us. Let us ponder the miracle of the virgin birth and all it means for us! Let us expect Him to come again, maybe any minute or day now. Then let us celebrate our Savior's birth in joy and peace! Let's pray ... AMEN

Three questions:

- 1) How has someone shown love to you this Advent season?
- 2) How have you shown love to someone else?
- 3) What can you do to finish out this season in love, especially showing the amazing grace of Christ to others?

Dialogue as much as possible. Close In prayer! AMEN

**Sermon Notes for "Light of Grace: Love-Mary" given on Week 4 of Advent
December 24, 2023 based on Luke 1 & 1 Cor. 13 given in Doster Church**

- I. L.O.V.E.
 - a. L = Learn
 - b. O = Obedience
- II. Love is a choice, Love is God, Love is a command
- III. We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. That means to love unconditionally without limit.
- IV. _____ is patient, _____ is kind. _____ does not envy, _____ does not boast, _____ is not proud. _____ does not dishonor others, _____ is not self-seeking, _____ is not easily angered, _____ keeps no record of wrongs. _____ does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. _____ always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
- V. L.O.V.E.
 - a. V = Virgin
 - b. E = Expectation
- VI. Three questions:
 - a. How has someone shown love to you this Advent?
 - b. How have you shown love to someone else?
 - c. What can you do to finish out this season in love, showing the grace of Christ to others?