

“All You Need Is Love: A Challenge!”
1 Corinthians 13

So many songs are written about love. It is a topic that never seems to get old for humanity. And so today as we begin our two-part series about love, I would like to highlight one of these iconic songs about love. On June 25, 1967, the very first live, international, satellite television broadcast was watched by over 400 million people, the largest television audience ever up until that point in time. The broadcast was called “Our World,” and it was an attempt to bring the world together through music. 14 countries participated in contributing “live” musical performances for the 2.5-hour show. For the United Kingdom’s contribution, the BBC commissioned the Beatles to write and perform a song especially for the broadcast. The Beatles were asked to come up with a song containing a simple message that could be understood by all nationalities. Brian Epstein, the Beatles’ manager, said, “It was an inspired song, and they really wanted to give the world a message. The nice thing about it is that it cannot be misinterpreted. It is a clear message saying that love is everything.”

When released after the broadcast, it quickly became another one of the Beatles’ number one hits. By reading the lyrics (on screen watch or in your bulletin for second service https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5ze_e4R9QY), you can easily see that the message was simple: all you need is love.

There’s nothing you can do that can’t be done.

Nothing you can sing that can’t be sung.

Nothing you can say but you can learn how to play the game.

It’s easy.

Nothing you can make that can’t be made.

No one you can save that can’t be saved.

Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time.

It’s easy.

All you need is love.

All you need is love.

All you need is love, love.

Love is all you need.

Nothing you can know that isn’t known.

Nothing you can see that isn’t shown.

Nowhere you can be that isn’t where you’re meant to be.

It’s easy.

All you need is love (Paul: All together, now!)

All you need is love. (Everybody!)

All you need is love, love.

Love is all you need (love is all you need).

While we know that the message of the song has deep truth, love in daily life is very hard and a major challenge for most of us. Not only that, but we also have the challenge of understanding what love is. We often reduce it to a feeling or a sense of weakness that anything goes if we are loving enough. In 1967, the same year the Beatles’ song was released, Martin Luther King Jr. said to a group that was opposing the Vietnam

war, “When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response. I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life.” [Source: Beyond Vietnam, 1967, <http://www.hartfordhwp.com/archives/45a/058.html>]

Of course, Dr. King at that point had written a powerful letter from Jail in 1963 responding to a statement of a criticism written from 8 white pastors cautioning him that his actions were “unwise and untimely” and even extreme! This is what he had to say about love, “But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you.’ Was not Amos an extremist for justice: ‘Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.’ Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: ‘I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.’ Was not Martin Luther an extremist: ‘Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.’ And John Bunyan: ‘I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.’ And Abraham Lincoln: ‘This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.’ And Thomas Jefferson: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ...’ So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?”

The kind of love which Dr. King spoke of is more aligned with the biblical kind of love of which the Apostle Paul speaks in the thirteenth chapter of his letter to the Corinthians. Corinth was a Roman city that had diversity in it, but also a strong spirit of division and competition. People were divided according to their social and economic classes. And the church there seemed to have the same spirit of division. Even though Paul spent 18 months in Corinth, the church still needed his help. They wrote him several letters and he wrote them back at least five letters. We only have fragments of those left. The reading for today is the response he was giving them to some of their struggles. We tend to think of this chapter as a reflection of perfect moments of love because we often hear it in the context of weddings. But the context of this chapter is actually conflict and divisions in the church. Their community was divided into factions around following different leaders: There were those who had their allegiance to Paul; those who had their allegiance to Apollos; those who followed Peter and those who followed Christ. Each group believed themselves to be better than the other groups. The community was being strangled by arguments about every decision and it seemed that some people are bragging about their spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. They even developed some tests to prove who was right and who was wrong based on the spiritual gifts of each group. That is why Paul felt it was important to write a letter to the Corinthians to help them return to their main focus and mission. All the gifts that they had were not goals in and of themselves. Paul was trying to help the Corinthians that they needed to remember what was really important for their mission and the call of Christ on their lives to be committed to his way of active love that rises about our likes and dislikes. Only the deep and abiding love of God in our hearts is capable of

transforming us to love like Christ did. The fierce kind of love and commitment which Dr. King exhibited came from internal life of faith which he cultivated so deeply. The kind of love which Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13 was not for the fainthearted or for those who just want to be nice and play it safe in life. It was not a love that would bring personal satisfaction to one's ego, but a love that would join the force of God's love in the world to bring healing and wholeness to our human divisions and brokenness.

Today, I invite you to consider how you cultivate this kind of love in your life. What helps you move beyond your personal pet peeves, expectations, fears, likes and dislikes? Our time in prayer each and everyday when we allow God's love to bubble up in our hearts, will change every aspect of our lives. Just like you wash your face every morning, you are invited to wash your heart and your life in the waters of God's love. Love does not just happen, it is a long process which God cultivates in our hearts and lives. Richard Rohr writes, "The path of prayer is taken by those rare people who consciously and slowly let go of their ego, their righteousness, their specialness, their sense of being important. In the journey of prayer, as you sink into the mystery of God's perfect love, you realize that you're nothing in the presence of God's goodness and greatness, and that God is working through you in spite of you."

So to end this time, I invite to a prayer time that I hope you can find useful in your daily life. It is from Brian McLaren's book *Naked Spirituality*. "Allow yourself to slow down and rest for a minute. As you feel your weight settle on your chair, let the weight of your soul rest back on the presence and love of God. Just be *here*. You might want to hear, in your imagination, the living God calling your name, repeated twice as with Moses and Paul (and others in the Bible too), inviting you to reply, '*Here I am.*' It might help you to repeat those words for a while, in rhythm with each breath. Simply present yourself to the Rock, the River, the Light, the Wind, the Shepherd, the Greatest, the Shaper of Beauty, the Merciful One, the Unnameable One, the Presence. '*Here I am. Here you are. Here we are together.*'... "You may then want to let your *here* progress to *who*: '*Who are you? Who am I? Who are we together?*' Try letting the question give you permission to let your understanding and experience of God expand, transcend, and surpass your current understandings and boundaries. Hold the space with *here* and *who*." Amen.