

January 31, 2016 Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 14:1a “Uncontrolling Love”

We all know this scripture passage. It along with John 3:16 is one of the two most quoted in the New Testament. We hear this passage read at weddings, but I prefer to read it at funerals. Many hear it as soft and sentimental, but it is actually harsh and accusing. Most hear it as positive and affirming but it was intended to be mostly negative and critical.

In the past few weeks we have reviewed the Apostle Paul’s understanding of **spiritual gifts**, and being gathered into **one body in Christ**. We have reviewed and recognized the struggles and challenges in this process of being gifted by **God** and becoming one body in **Christ**. The Apostle Paul really gives it to the Corinthian Christians, and then he tells them that they are so messed up that there is a better way altogether. Forget the gifts try Love.

All the fancy words in heaven or on earth are just a lot of noise without love in it.
All the wisdom and conviction in the world without love is simple empty striving.
All the charity or piety or self-denial imaginable is bankrupt without love in it.

Paul says love is patient and kind and then tells the Corinthian eight things that love isn’t: all the things that they are doing: All the ways they are misbehaving.

Do we see ourselves in the longer list of what isn’t love or loving?
Paul expected the Corinthian Christians to see themselves there. He told them that their *“strutting, me first, swelled head, fly off the handle, keeping score, and reveling in others misfortune* were all wrong. In fact their hang ups about spiritual gifts were absolutely unloving.

He finishes with the things that love does without ceasing. In the end we have faith and hope and gifts and love but love must come first. And this love according to Paul is devoid of any coercive power or self-importance or need for control. It is an uncontrolling love. Check it out.

Back in April, 2015, I told the story “The Rabbi’s Gift”. It tells us about uncontroled love. I will just give you the “Reader’s Digest” version today.

The story concerns a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Once a great order, as a result of waves of anti-monastic persecution and the rise of secularism, all its branch houses were lost. Now there were only five monks left in the decaying mother house: the abbot and four others, all over seventy in age.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a rabbi from a nearby town used for a hermitage. The abbot decided one day to visit the hermitage and ask the rabbi if by some possible chance he could offer any advice that might save the monastery.

The rabbi welcomed the abbot at his hut. But when the abbot explained the purpose of his visit, the rabbi could only commiserate with him. As he was about to leave the abbot realizing that he had not addressed the reason for the visit asked the rabbi for any advice he could give to help save the dying order.

"No, I am sorry," the rabbi responded.

"I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is the Messiah is one of you."

When the abbot returned to the monastery he told the other monks that the rabbi couldn't help.

"The one thing he did say, just as I was leaving – was that the Messiah is one of us. I don't know what he meant."

In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the rabbi's words. The **Messiah** is one of us? They were well aware of one another's short comings and idiosyncrasies. Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that's the case, which one?

As they contemplated one another as possibly being the Messiah, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off

chance that one among them might be the **Messiah**. And on the off chance that each monk himself might be the **Messiah**, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Now, people occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its forested paths, even to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. Without even being conscious of it, they sensed the aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. They began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.

Then some of the younger men who came to visit started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another. And another. So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the rabbi's gift, a *place of uncontroing love*.

We remember when **God's** uncontroing love first touched our hearts: Warmed us from deep inside and awaken us to the Mystery in the midst of life.

We remember when our seeking self, first opened up to **Jesus**. Maybe we were a little afraid or unsure or finally relieved to be loved for whom we were.

We remember when that inner '**Aha**' set us on the **Spirit's** path toward uncontroing love.

We remember with the apostle **Paul** how we must first put **God's** uncontroing love into everything we do.

Application for Today:

“Remember to go after a life of uncontroing love as if your life depended on it – because it does.”

Hymn #372 Though I May Speak

January 31, 2016 Luke 4: 17-30

There is a powerful new movie out with lots of Oscar nominations, “The Big Short”. It chronicles the Subprime Mortgage debacle in 2007 leading to the worldwide financial meltdown, where over 5 trillion dollars of investments disappeared over night: Where over one million people lost their homes in the U.S. alone. We know all about it and many of us were affected by it. Well, I just felt desolate after watching it. I already knew a lot about what happened but to see it graphically portrayed left me numbed. In one scene an investor who is trying to grasp the scope of the mounting crisis in order to bet against the market leaves the room to confer with his partners asking in bewilderment ***“What am I missing? Why are they confessing to us?”*** The answer comes back ***“They aren’t confessing, they’re bragging.”***

Well it sure got me thinking again about the cynical and self-involved nature of our society and the increasingly pathological tendencies of the individuals and institutions which run our world. Then it got me thinking about our gospel lesson; **Jesus** returns home to Nazareth and stands up in the meeting place to tell his people what has happened to him. He receives the scroll of the prophet, finds ***the place where it was written*** and lets them know what it means to experience **God** acting through him. He rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant and sits down. All eyes fix on him. And then to punctuate the point he says, **“Today this scripture has made history in your hearing.”**

Initially there is a murmuring of approval but then, as so often happens, familiarity breeds contempt. ***“Isn’t this Joseph’s kid?”*** **Jesus** responds, ***“I guess you are going to recite to me ‘Physician, heal thyself.’”*** He continues with the tales of Elijah and Elisha when they performed miracles and wonders only for Gentiles and not the chosen people. In a rush of words he implies that the Gentiles of Capernaum are more worthy of him than his own hometown. Stunned silence. Then the thought, ***“He’s not confessing, he’s bragging!”***

The hometown crowd gets it all wrong and so we see the full turn from cheers, to Jeers, from approval to contempt. This homecoming vividly foreshadows the tragic shift from Palm Sunday celebration to Good Friday crucifixion. The poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the oppressed: Beautiful words, wonderful sentiment, but the instant a group senses the program just might not be all about wonderful them, they lay hands on the prophet and drive him away, up to the “brow of the hill” to Calvary.

Jesus’ homecoming frames the entire gospel, calling our attention to the sad fact that we also get it wrong, get it backwards. What we often *brag* about actually needs to be our *confession*. What we pride ourselves in are the very attitudes, gifts and abilities that keep us from embracing an uncontroled love.

Notice that **Jesus** took the scroll and found “*the place where it was written*”. Through his *confession* we learn that *the place where it was written* is actually written on **Jesus’** heart. We also discover *where it wasn’t written*; it wasn’t written on the hearts of the home town crowd. So, in our cynical and pathological times: How do we reverse the *bragging* instead of *confessing* syndrome? How can we know if **the place where it is written** is actually on our hearts?

Remember that story “The Rabbi’s Gift”. Well, it also tells us how we can know for sure. I will just cover the highlights this time.

Remember, the once a great order had become decimated to the extent that there were only five monks left in the decaying mother house: the abbot and four others, all over seventy in age.

In the woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a local rabbi used for a hermitage. The abbot decided one day to visit the hermitage and ask the rabbi if he could offer any advice that might save them.

The rabbi could give no advice. The only thing he could tell the abbot was the *Messiah was one of them*.

When the abbot returned to the monastery he told his fellow monks that the rabbi said, “*the Messiah is one of us*”. But didn't know what he meant.

In the days and months that followed, the old monks wondered whether this could possibly be true. The *Messiah is one of us?* They were well aware of one another's short comings and idiosyncrasies. But as they contemplated one another as possibly being the Messiah, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the **Messiah**. And on the off chance that each monk himself might be the **Messiah**, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Remember, people occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its lawn, to wander along its paths, even to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. Without even being conscious of it, they sensed the aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them. They began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, play or pray. They began to bring their friends and their friends brought their friends.

Then some of the younger men started to talk with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another; and so on. So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the rabbi's gift, a *place where it was written, where uncontroing love was written* on human hearts.

This is how we know if **the place where it is written** is written on our own heart. It is how we treat one another that makes it so, and opens us up to **God's** future.

Application for Today

Only when we begin to see **Christ** IN our neighbour can we become **Christ** TO our neighbour. And become *a place where uncontroing love is written* for today: A place where **bragging** stops and **confession** begins.