

# Macalester Plymouth

UNITED CHURCH

“Revolutionary Love”

Rev. Adam Blons

November 15, 2020

Our theme this stewardship season, “An Enduring Love” was taken from today’s scripture reading. Paul’s ode to love from 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most familiar love passages in the whole Bible and probably Paul’s most famous lines. It is a popular reading at weddings for its list of love’s attributes. And yet, Paul wasn’t writing with marriage in mind. In fact, Paul is writing to the early church in Corinth that was divided, quarreling brother with sister, arguing over truth, and claiming allegiance to opposite leaders. Paul calls the church back to the core message of the Gospel: love.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

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.

May these words be to us our light and our life. Thanks be to God!

Balbir Singh Sodhi was a gas station owner in Mesa, Arizona. On September 15, 2001, as Balbir planted a garden in front of his gas station, a man seeking retaliation for the attacks on 9-11 drove up and killed him. Balbir, a Sikh, was the first person murdered in the spree of hate crimes against Muslims, Arabs and Sikhs in the days and months following. Balbir began his last day alive by making a donation to support the victims of the 9-11 attacks.

Valerie Kaur, an Iranian-American attorney, author, filmmaker, and a Sikh herself was enraged and inspired by Balbir's senseless death to organize against hate in this country. Through her films, numerous lawsuits and campaigns over 15 years, she and others confronted the racism in our communities and institutions and humanized black and brown people. Everything changed for her in the fall of 2016, just after Valerie became a new mother. She held her newborn as she saw a new unprecedented wave of anti-immigrant hate crimes following the 2016 elections. Much to her dismay, the wave of violence was even greater than in the period after 9-11. Valerie suddenly found herself in an existential crisis. What had she really accomplished through all her campaigns, lawsuits and films? In an interview a few months ago on Parker Palmer's *The Growing Edge* podcast, Valerie Kaur reflected on this moment. In her testimony I heard something that spoke to my own existential crisis in these times.

Kaur said, "I poured through the stories of my life and I poured through the texts that I had acquired over the years around social justice movements in the past and I thought out of all the work that we had done with these communities. [I realized] It was never our films, our lawsuits, or our campaigns that ultimately made the change for the people I worked with. It was something completely unexpected that I had not seen until that moment. It was the ethic of love. If love was present with these communities, if they were receiving love in the wake of a massacre, if they were responding to hate and violence and injustice with love, if they were loving themselves in the process, then I could see how people could last and survive and build resilience and start to create pockets of transformation in their lives and their communities." (<https://www.newcomerpalmer.com/episodes/episode-22-revolutionary-love-a-conversation-with-authoractivist-valerie-kaur>)

The Apostle Paul reminded the fragile early church at Corinth that love was how they, too, would survive. Brought to the brink of destruction because of internal conflict, division, fear, mistrust, and conflicting allegiances, the church at Corinth had forgotten the core message of Jesus' life and teaching. In today's reading Paul calls them back to the simple yet profound task of loving one another. And yet, if you read the whole passage again, you will notice that never once is love described as a feeling. Instead, love is always action. Love is patient, kind, humble, rejoicing in the truth, etc. In fact, New Testament Scholar Brian Peterson points out that the English translation fails to adequately express love's actions. (<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-1-corinthians-131-13-5>)

As I understand it, this famous list of love's attributes are not adjectives but verbs. Love shows patience, demonstrates kindness, acts humbly. Love is doing these things not simply being them. The love Paul seeks to rekindle in the church is known by what it does not by how it makes us feel. In short, love works.

Valerie Kaur described it this way, “Love is more than a feeling. Love is sweet labor. Fierce. Bloody. Imperfect. Life giving. It is a choice we make over and over again. And when we choose to love beyond what evolution requires, when we choose to love beyond our own kin, when we love others who do not look like us, when we love even our opponents, when we love ourselves that we too often neglect, then love becomes revolutionary.” Valerie came out with a book this year entitled, [See No Stranger: A Memoir & Manifesto of Revolutionary Love](#). I haven’t read it yet, but I recognize this revolutionary love. I see it reflected in the love modeled by Jesus and the love that calls us to be the church.

The love we profess and celebrate 52 weeks per year is more than an a lofty abstract ideal, more than a hallmark card feeling, it is revolutionary seeking to transform us and the world by what it does every day. It is revolutionary to love your enemies, turn the other cheek, give away all you have, put the last first, welcome the stranger, eat with sinners, embrace the untouchables, and give up your life for others. As followers of Jesus, we are called to practice this revolutionary love in our lives every day. It is this revolutionary love that calls us together as the church and sends us out to participate with God in changing the world through it. This revolutionary love we profess will not just help us hunker down and bear all things, endure all things in this challenging year. This revolutionary love makes us resilient, able to not merely survive, but to respond to the possibilities for transformation emerging even now in the world. Even if we only see those possibilities now dimly as if in a mirror, Paul reminds us that this revolutionary love promises we will soon see them face to face. And when we do see them, we must be ready to put our love to work.

I don’t have to convince you that this world needs this revolutionary love. But I think we still need convincing that we are who we are because of it.

We are a sanctuary church because of this revolutionary love.

We provided bagels, coffee and a place to warm up to the striking teachers at the neighborhood school because of this love.

We are a more light/open and affirming church because of this revolutionary love.

We caught the attention of the neighborhood with our rainbow colored doors because of this love.

We are a creation care/creation justice church because of this revolutionary love.

We switched from a gas to an electric stove because of this love.

We care for one another because of this revolutionary love, showing up with meals even in the midst of a pandemic.

We work for justice in our community because of this revolutionary love, writing post cards and making hundreds of phone calls to help get out the vote this election season.

This church is Christ’s revolutionary love in action. We need to name it, claim it proudly, and let it claim us. Macalester Plymouth United Church is where God’s love works!

Amen.