

Year C*Epiphany 4*2010*Love Goes Everywhere
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Paul gives us the theory. The profound theory that love is what it's all about,
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,^a but do not have love, I gain nothing. ¹

Paul then, boldly goes on to tell us the nature of love.
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.²

It's this boundary-crossing, never-ending, nature of love that I want to talk about today.
Love bears all things, so that every person, every circumstance is held in the arms of a
power greater than ourselves as a mother holds her baby.
Love believes all things so that every ideology and belief system is already being
infiltrated and redeemed by the power of love.
Love hopes all things, so that we can never give ourselves or anybody else up for lost.
Love will find a way.
Love endures all things, so that no power can outlast love's power to love.

Nothing stops love.
Not time.
Not space.
Not hate.
Not death.

This is the radically good news.
And, since the First Letter of John says that God is love the door is wide open to say
nothing stops God.
Not time.
Not space.
Not hate.
Not death.

^a Other ancient authorities read *body to be burned*

¹*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Co 13:1-3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

²*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Co 13:4-8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

No matter what the world hurls at us, or we hurl at ourselves; disaster, disappointment, sin, cruelty, greed, violence, love is greater.

Last Sunday in Sunday School we sang the Mavis Staples tune.

Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around
Turn me Round

Ain't gonna let injustice. . .
Ain't gonna let discrimination. . .
Ain't gonna let no hatred. . .
Ain't gonna let oppression. . .
Ain't gonna let no war. . .
Ain't gonna let intolerance. . .
Turn me Round

I'm gonna keep on a'walkin
Keep on a'talkin
Marchin' up to freedom's land

Then we played with it and imagined the smaller, personal things we sometimes struggle with. We said we were not going to let depression, or timidity, or sleepiness turn us around.

Then Julianna Silver told us that she saw report from Haiti and a group of people were show singing that same song. And I wondered what they might claim love was greater than.

Ain't gonna let no earthquake turn us around.
Ain't gonna let no history of colonialism and corruption turn us around.

This is how determined love is to love.

Now all this good, and right, and powerful.

But Jesus wants to make sure we keep it real.
He shows us that this boundary-crossing, determined, powerful love,
goes where God wants it to go not where we want it to go.

And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were

also many lepers^d in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”³

Do you know what he’s saying!?

The widow Elijah helps is not a Jew. She’s a Gentile.

The leper Elisha heals is not a Jew. He’s a Gentile. A commander in the army of Israel’s enemy.

He’s saying to Jews that God helps Gentiles.

He’s saying there really are no chosen people after all because love transcends the boundaries of whose thinks they are chosen.

And this makes Jesus’ hometown mad.

Gay Byron says, “. . . the message of Jesus was not simply a seal of approval, but rather a message that threatened to dismantle the status quo and the stereotypes that defined the religious and social boundaries of those in the synagogue.” (*Feasting on the Word, Year C, vol.1, page 313*)

In other words he’s saying God’s love is for and with,

Rush Limbaugh and Bill Clinton,

Walmart and Earthfare,

the soldiers of the United States Army and the soldiers of the Taliban,

hardcore right-wingers and left-wing zanies,

Pat Robertson and John Spong.

It’s important here to go to the edge,

to the person or the people who we think we don’t need to care about,

the people we dismiss, are dismissive of.

Jesus is saying love reaches those we don’t love.

God’s love is really for everyone Jesus says.

Everyone. . . really.

So here’s the deal.

Can we stand the heat in the kitchen of God’s love?

Because he is going to invite everyone into that intimate and friendly place.

Can we strive to see everyone as a child of our heavenly Father no matter how much they annoy or even threaten us?

Can we, in our own little community keep extending good will to each other even when we drive each other to distraction?

When we do we step a little further into the kingdom of God.

^dThe terms *leper* and *leprosy* can refer to several diseases

³*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Lk 4:24-27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

When we don't we're trying to throw Jesus off the brow of the hill.
And something tells me that won't work.

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.⁴

Jesus is going on his way;
to Iraq,
to Haiti,
to the people who annoy me, or disagree with me,
to the people who need him.

Becoming Christian means to commit to that same way, that same path.
To finally grow up in love.

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.⁵

And just to show this really is what Paul means to say, listen. . .

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁶

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters,⁹ what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.⁷

⁴*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Lk 4:28-30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁵*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Co 13:11-13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁶*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ro 8:35-39). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁹Gk *your brothers*

⁷*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Mt 5:43-48). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.