

If You Ain't Got This.....

I Cor. 13: 1-8

February 10, 2019

Res. Reading # 653

Anyone here watch the Superbowl last week? Anyone watch it for the game or just the commercials? I thought it was an interesting game, certainly quite unusual. It was certainly all about the tremendous defense ability of both teams, keeping each others offense from scoring. I don't know a lot about football, but I don't think I have ever seen a game quite like it. What I did see, seemed to be a good, clean game, both teams honestly trying to win. There seemed to be a good level of sportsmanship on each side, which is what I like to see from professional athletes or athletes at any level.

When the game was over, the winning team, The New England Patriots, were presented with what they have worked so hard to achieve all season long, The Lombardi Trophy. Of course, for those of you who are too young to remember, the trophy is named for the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi, who was known as a pretty tough cookie when it came to football, and who coached his Packers to a win in the very first Superbowl game ever played.

A few years ago, my son, Jamie, and I were talking about Coach Lombardi and his reputation as a coach and one of the more famous quotes attributed to him, which I believe went : "If you ain't got teamwork, you ain't got diddly" I explained to Jamie

that Coach Lombardi's philosophy of winning team sports was that everyone on that team played together, like a team. Teamwork was the absolute, number one element in successful football, and it was what he believed, what he coached, and how he led his team.

Well, the football season is over for another year, and the winners and their opponents can go home and rest up for another year. And later on this week is another important day: It is Valentine's Day, a day when a great deal of the world sets aside some time to celebrate a very major part of the human experience, and that is love.

Now, there are a great many kinds of love. The Bible itself references three different kinds of love, as the original languages that the Bible was written in offer three different words that translate into our English word, "Love", but which originally meant three very different kinds of love. First, there is "philia" a kind of brotherly love, and then "eros" which is a sexual affection, and then there is "agape" which is used in the original texts of the Bible to describe God's love. Agape indicates a divine, unconditional, self-sacrificing, active, volitional, and thoughtful love. It is with this word, agape, that Jesus most often speaks about love, giving us an idea of the depth and breadth and scope of God's love for us.

Love is spoken of very often throughout the Word of God. We are told that we are to love God, because He loved us first. Jesus told us that above all, we are to love God with our hearts, our souls, and our minds, and that secondly, we are to love our neighbors

as ourselves, and upon this law, all of God's other commandments to us are built. And the core of our faith, the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is most concisely explained by one verse which says: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believed on Him would not perish, but have everlasting life". There is so much about God that is explained to us using the word love, so many instances in His Word where He acted out of love, that it must surely be a very important part of Who God is. We are told that He created us out of love, and that He has redeemed us out of love, and that in any number of instances He reaches out to us in love. Aren't we blessed that God is love, and not something else? And isn't it a remarkable thing that He, as great as He is, loves us, as diminutive as we are compared to all of the rest of the universe?

People have been trying to define exactly what love is for as long as its presence has been realized by the human family. It was the Apostle Paul who for many of us, has done a pretty fair job of putting into words what the Lord had in mind when He gave mankind this great gift. Most people hear the words that are the central part of our scripture lesson for this morning when they go to a wedding, because these words are often used there. But they could fit just as well into other kinds of loving relationships, if we stop and think about them for a moment.

Here they are once again, in a very memorable part of scripture, usually entitled the "love" chapter. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of

wrongs. Love doesn't delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails". Now, these are pretty powerful words, and I have seen them in action and can attest to them and to their power to get people's attention. I have had the opportunity to perform marriages at the city hall where I work, and I inform the couples before we begin that I am a Christian and will only offer a Christian marriage ceremony, and if that's O.K. with them, then I am happy to officiate for them. I have seen some young fellows who have come in to get married who are pretty rough and tough, pretty self-confident, knowing exactly who they are and what they expect out of life. And as we go through the marriage ceremony, I go very slowly over these words about love that we have just read. And I can see their whole demeanor begin to change, and they look over at the girl whose hand they are holding and receiving in marriage, and sometimes they swallow a little bit hard, and they begin to look very thoughtful as they contemplate the words of the Apostle: "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast". And usually by the time Paul's words are done, he has made a pretty decent bridegroom out of them, and they embrace their new life partners in a way that seems quite different than it would have been just a few short minutes before.

Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast. There is an old story about a couple that had been married for seventy-five years, yes that's right, for seventy-five years. They had started out young, and had raised a family and had stayed, according to the papers, happily married all of that length of time. They asked the husband what was the secret to such a long and happy marriage, and he said, " Well, when we got

married, it was decided that I would make all of the important decisions and she would make all of the unimportant ones. And as it turns out, in all of the time, we've never faced an important decision".

Sometimes, love is the easiest of emotions. When we first meet that special person that we have been searching for, when we see a beautiful child, when we are embraced by someone who has been dear to us throughout our lives, well then love just sweeps over us and is as natural to experience as breathing.

But there are times when it might be more challenging for us to love, or to be loved. Perhaps things aren't going our way, perhaps we would much prefer to be doing something else, perhaps we would much rather be involved in something else, but we gladly put someone else first, in order to show them how much we love them. I remember seeing it in my older nephews when they were in their late teens and early twenties and it always made me laugh. If they took a girl to the movies, I liked to ask them what movie they saw, because I knew that they would much prefer the big action, explosions all over the place kind of movies, but if they went to see the warm, sensitive, relationship based movies, then I knew that they were serious about the relationship that they had with the young lady. And, similarly, they were always impressed when the girl would go with them to see the big action and explosion stuff. I guess at that age, that's how you demonstrate putting someone else's feelings ahead of your own.

Love is patient, love is kind. Sometimes it gets much more complicated than letting the other person choose the movie. Sometimes it means looking beyond what is in front of

you and seeing something that no one else is looking for , or allowing someone else to see the real us. When Mother Theresa of Calcutta was asked how she could embrace so tenderly the poor and the sick and the dying people that she found on the streets of that overcrowded city, and bring them in to her hospital and care for their needs, even as many of them died in her arms, she said that when she looked into their faces, she didn't see the ugliness that years of abuse and neglect from this world had brought onto them. Instead, she looked past all of that and saw the face of Jesus in theirs, and as she ministered and cared for them, she was ministering and caring for Him. And in this way, it was easy to give of herself, lovingly, to these poor souls who so desperately needed someone to love them.

Sometimes it's not necessarily easy to love. Those other kinds of love that the Bible speaks about, the brotherly love which binds us human beings in the bonds of friendship, and the erotic love which helps to perpetuate our species, have their place in the world. But beyond that, is the selfless, giving, all encompassing, nurturing kind of love, the agape love, that is of God. It is a love that we do not necessarily always deserve, but the love through which He looks at us and with which He holds us close to Himself.

Because, just as it isn't always easy to love someone else, so too is it not always easy for someone else, even God, to love us, and yet He does. A certain speaker once illustrated this point in this way. This gentleman was conducting a seminar on God's love for us, and began his talk by holding up a fresh, new twenty dollar bill. "Who would like this \$20 bill" he asked. Hands started going up throughout the audience.

He said, "I am going to give this \$20 to one of you, but first let me do this." He proceeded to crumple up the bill. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" The same hands went up in the air. "Well", he replied, "What if I do this?" he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, all crumpled and dirty. "Now who still wants it?" Again, hands went into the air.

"You have all learned a valuable lesson," the speaker said. "No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20. Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value in God's eyes. Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are priceless to Him."

Beloved, sometimes we might not be the most appealing or the most loveable at certain times in our lives, and are still loved by others. That is true love, the giving and selfless kind of love that God embraces us with. That's the "love is patient, love is kind" sort of love. It is being loved when we don't necessarily deserve it. And just as this is sometimes the case in our lives, so too do the people around us deserve the same kind of love from us. Because love isn't something that is deserved. True love is something that is given and received in spite of ourselves. It is the selfless, giving, patient and kind sort of love that God gives to us. It is what makes our lives worthwhile. Giving and receiving this

kind of love is what makes us children of God.

In a magazine called “The Christian Leader”, Don Ratzlaff retells a story that a man named Vernon Grounds came across in Ernest Gordon’s “Miracle on the River Kwai”.

You folks will remember the movie based on this book about World War II. The Scottish soldiers, forced by their Japanese captors to labor on a jungle railroad, had degenerated to barbarous behavior, but one afternoon something happened: A shovel was missing. The Japanese officer in charge became enraged. He demanded that the missing shovel be produced, or else. When nobody in the squadron budged, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot. It was obvious that the officer meant what he had said. The, finally, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the man to death. When it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to the second toll check. This time, no shovel was missing. Indeed, there had been a miscount at the first checkpoint.

The word spread like wildfire through the whole camp. An innocent man had been willing to die to save the other! The incident had a profound effect. The men began to treat each other like brothers. When the victorious Allies finally swept in, the survivors, human skeletons, lined up in front of their captors, and instead of attacking their captors, insisted “No more hatred. No more killing. Now what we need is forgiveness”. The sacrificial love of one man had that kind of power.

The sacrificial love of Jesus Christ has that kind of power. Jesus loved us enough,

crumpled and dirty though we might be, to offer Himself in our place, to exchange His Holy life for ours. That's what love is, what real love, patient and kind love, really is. That's the kind of love with which Jesus looks at us. On Valentines Day, on any day, on every day, God looks at us with love, whether we might deserve it, or not. We need only to accept it. And perhaps in accepting it, we can share it with those around us, some of whom might be deserving, some not so much, some of whom don't believe they are deserving, and who might need convincing. In any case, real love, Godly love, will always be the same. Love is patient, love is kind. Let's be grateful that God made it that way.

Let us Pray.