

The four "all things"

At the end of their first date, a young fellow takes the girl back to her home. On the front porch, leaning against the wall with a bit of swagger, he decides to try for that important first kiss.

He: "Sweet thing, how 'bout a good night kiss?"

She: "Oh, I couldn't do that. My parents will see us!"

He: "Oh come on! Who's gonna see us at this hour?"

She: "No, please. I would just die of embarrassment if someone saw us."

He: "Baby, there's nobody around, they're all sleeping!"

She: "No way. It's just too risky!"

He: "Oh please, please, I like you so much!!!"

She: "No. I like you too, but I just can't!"

He: "Oh yes you can. Please, Sugar? Please?"

She: "No, no. I just can't."

He: "Pleeeeeeease?..."

Then the porch light goes on and the girl's sister shows up in her pyjamas, sleepy, hair dishevelled. "Dad says go ahead and give him a kiss. Or I can do it. Or if need be, he'll come down himself and do it. But for crying out loud tell him to take his hand off the intercom button!"

Our exploration of love through looking closely at 1 Corinthians 13 for a few weeks is becoming a wonderful revelation. Our sermons are a starting point but conversation during and after services adds so much more.

At the 10:30 café church one of our youngest church members has brought us an insight the rest of us were happy to applaud.

Last week, in answer to the question 'is love instinctive or learned' EW answered, "I instinctively love my Mum and Dad, I'm learning to love my brothers"!!! A great answer.

I know many have been practising patience and kindness as two of the highest qualities of love – in fact it's becoming a simple Mantra...*patience and kindness, patience and kindness.*

This last week our homework was to give others that we meet our full attention. I did have that in mind at the Costa meet and greet on Wednesday although the place was overflowing with church members.

This week my focus is a single verse – the four "all things". Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Before I get to them in details, I've been trying to picture what St. Paul is saying in this chapter. Where is he looking as he speaks.

In verses 1 to 3, he looks to himself and allows himself to be the illustration.

If **I** speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels....

If **I** have prophetic powers...

If **I** give away all I possess....

In those three verses he teaches that without love he is nothing, he gains nothing and is a noisy irritating clang of a cymbal to boot.

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In verse 4 to 7 – St.Paul alternates his gaze between God and the Corinthians. When he is speaking positively about love he is describing God’s character. Love is patient, love is kind.

When he speaks about what love is not – he is looking at the behaviour of the Corinthians. By inference, if love is not envious, boastful, arrogant, rude, insistent, irritable, resentful, and gleeful about wrong happening to others – love must be the opposite – i.e. the character of Jesus is opposite.

Not envious – generous.

Not boastful – modest.

Not arrogant – humble.

Not rude (or shameful) – but admirable or honourable.

Not insistent – collaborative and meek.

Not irritable – good humoured

Not resentful – contented.

Not taking joy from the wrong that happens to others but compassionate.

There’s a lifetimes work in our aspiration to allow these qualities to develop and flourish. Because 1 Cor13 is so frequently read at weddings it allows the minister to expound on how these qualities can grow as the marriage grows. This week Katherine and I had our 32nd anniversary...

We were married for better or worse. I couldn't have done any better, and she....

Rita Runder said “I love being married, it’s so great to find one special person you want to annoy for the rest of your life”

If being generous, modest, humble, admirable, collaborative, good humoured, contented and compassionate are the Christlike qualities we wish to grow, how then do we view the “all things” from verse 7.

Love

bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I think St.Paul has the character of Jesus in mind as he writes these words and for me they have become foundation stones. These qualities of love are fundamental ones above which the others can be built. But what do they mean?

Bible translation really matters. Being able to compare what various translations have to offer can help get below the surface of meaning – because of course language and meaning change over time.

Take the first one – Love bears all things?

I’ve also read – always protects. Is supportive. Put up with anything.

There are two nuances to “bears all things”. The first is a sense in which love covers over a multitude of sins and hurts. It doesn’t drag them all into the light of day but slowly and quietly goes about mending that which is broken.

Equally love bears insult and injury and disappointment. Think of Jesus being nailed to the cross. “Father forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing”.

Love believes all things. The “all things” here are the promises of God and his faithfulness. It doesn’t mean we gullibly believe any old tosh. Love leads us to believe all that God says. Jesus trusted absolutely in the Father even in surrendering his life.

Love hopes all things as in, never cease to hope. Our hope is in Jesus Christ and the present experience of grace that affirms our belief for the future. Christians should be people of future hope. Things may not have worked out now, and life might be

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dark and difficult, but the story isn't over yet. Jesus modelled that hope and encouraged everyone everywhere – the kingdom of God is near.

Love endures all things – I think this is my favourite. It's not a stubborn, blind, stoic plod through life that puts up with everything, but a triumphant fortitude that conquers and overcomes. We commit to being people of love and allowing love to be the transforming spirit by which the kingdom of God comes. I met a church member this week who has a terminal illness. They were vibrant and joyful and holy and graceful triumphantly turning the end...which is coming...into a celebration.

The church is to become a place where Christian Character is formed and we have the grace to allow each other to fail, pick ourselves up and try again. We are to grow in the characteristics of love, be they the foundation stones of love or the beautiful architecture of graceful love.

We need to keep practising, so don't let up on patience and kindness, giving full attention to others and growing the Christlike qualities of love. But what should we specifically take away this week? I'm going to let the Psalm be the answer.

¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

¹³ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;

²¹ Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.

As well as growing in love – can we make this week one through which we give thanks repeatedly? If we are enduring,

or exercising patience, hope or seeking to be kind...wherever we might be tempted to moan or criticise – we give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love?

The Psalm speaks of all manner of situations people found themselves – they cried out to God and he rescued them – give thanks to the Lord for His steadfast love. That means that what is not yet answered or resolved or transformed has not escaped God's attention. It allows us to practice our endurance.