

Love is patient, Love is kind.
June 28, 2009
Corinthians 13:4a

Once a week, I get the privilege of doing a grocery store run. I push a shopping cart around the store looking for items. Shopping carts sometimes provide great adventure. You never know what is going to happen.

Sometimes its quite inconvenient to get a cart. The store I go to has little corrals housing the carts. You have to put in your Loonie to release the cart from the others. But if you can't park in the same row as the cart corral, you first have to walk over to the corral. Then you get your cart go into the store and get your groceries. Then you have to drive your cart down the row to your car. After unloading the groceries, you drive the cart back to the row with the corral to get your loonie back. That's not a big deal in the summer. But in the winter, it can be quite inconvenient getting that convenience cart.

Sometimes carts frustrate us. I often get a cart with a wiggly wheel at the front. So the cart shudders the whole time sending shivers up my arms and through my body. But most frustrating is the cart determined to turn one direction. Usually it wants to go in the exact

opposite direction of the majority of turns I make. The whole shopping trip is a struggle against this rebellious shopping cart. When you keep banging the cart into the shelves, people wonder "don't you know how to drive a cart buddy?" When I get a cart like that, one of my greatest victories comes in putting it back into the little corral. I don't gently put it back. I love to get that evil cart lined up with one in front. Then I run behind the cart so it slams into the previous cart. I leave convinced I have taught that cart a lesson.

Sometimes carts hurt us. Most often, this happens when people driving other carts ram you from behind getting your ankles with the bottom shelf of their cart. I've been hit by an empty cart blown by a strong wind or backed into the handle of the cart when I've bent to look at something on a lower shelf. Shopping carts can be a great help. But they can also inconvenience, frustrate and hurt us.

People are like shopping carts. Sometimes they inconvenience us. If you've got young children, it's tempting to conclude that sometimes they are a permanent inconvenience machine. "Daddy, see what I drew. Daddy, look at what I found in this book. I don't care if you're driving right now. I want you to risk the lives of our entire

family and other drivers on the road by turning around and acknowledging my discovery. Daddy, I'm thirsty and I need a drink now."

A customer comes into our workplace five minutes before closing with a question that will take a long time to address. Another driver cuts you off in traffic and now you have to wait longer at the light. A ministry volunteer doesn't show up for their slot in the schedule. Now you have to cover it off and you've done it 3 weeks straight. People can be so inconvenient.

Other people frustrate us or disappoint us. We thought we resolved something with that person. But then they keep throwing little barbs or making sarcastic comments that keep referring back to the issue. Parents with young adult children; you brought your kids to church; you poured your values into them and did the best you could in passing on the faith to them. But now they are making choices that frustrate you. You're disappointed that their passion for God seems gone.

Your spouse said they would be there; said they would remember; promised to change; but they forgot or did the same thing.

Your so called friend always has to have it their way. You're getting tired of their overbearing spirit. You've been walking with that person in discipleship. But they fall off the wagon or go back to an old habit.

Some people hurt us. They break a confidence. They slander our name. They pass on gossip. They yell, lie, or accuse. They only talk to you when they want something. They lord it over you. They ignore you. They hold a grudge and act to maintain grudges against you and whenever an opportunity arises, they act to injure you with a spirit of malice.

How do you respond to people that inconvenience you, frustrate you or hurt you? We naturally want to inform the inconvenient of their inconvenience with words, sighs or rolled eyes. We naturally want to blow up at the frustrating or disappointing people. We naturally want to strike back or cut off those who hurt us.

But God expects a totally different response from His people. It comes in a four letter word – LOVE. The kind of love He expects goes way beyond any natural human response. In fact, we can't offer this love apart from Him. But what God commands, He provides.

We return today to the series on Biblical love. Three weeks ago, we began this summer study examining First Corinthians thirteen. You hear it a lot at weddings. But we discovered this passage was first directed to a church in trouble. They had tons of issues. Their biggest problem was lack of love to each other. So the apostle Paul, who founded this church, writes them a letter. In the midst of dealing with their division over spiritual gifts, he drops this piece describing love.

He uses fifteen words to describe the kind of love God expects His people to give others. Offering this kind of love is not optional for Christians. We can't be Christians and not love. Lack of love damages our relationships, our spiritual health and our witness. Jesus said to His disciples – “A new commandment I give you. Love one another. By this all men will know you are my disciples, IF YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER.”

So for Christians looking out to others and looking in to each other, love must define us. So today we will first look at the word Paul uses for love throughout this passage. Then we will look at the first descriptions of love Paul provides. By the end of that, you will hopefully share my conviction that it is impossible to offer this kind of

love in our own strength. But then we'll conclude by asking how can we in fact receive the power to offer this kind of love. My hope is you will leave encouraged, empowered and enabled by the Lord to offer this deep love to shopping cart people in your life and in our world.

1 Corinthians 13 NIV

Love

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹²Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

What word does Paul use for love in 1 Corinthians 13?

In English, we basically have one word for love. But it does not adequately describe all that love involves. The dictionary contains at least 11 definitions for the simple word love. Paul wrote in Greek, the dominant trade language of the day. There were several words for love. Eros referred to physical love and attraction. Philo described warm love between friends. But Paul uses the word *agape* for love in 1st Corinthians 13.

Now it's interesting that the general Greek population did not really like this word for love. One theological dictionary states "in the word *agape*, the Greek finds nothing of the power or magic of *eros* and little of the warmth of *philein*. Its origin was uncertain and its meaning is weak and variable. Often, it meant no more than to be satisfied with something."

But for Christians, the meaning of "*agape*" changed with the cross. "For God so "agaped" the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) Gospel writer John chose *agape* to translate Jesus' words to the disciples – "A new commandment I give you, "agapaw" one another. Author David Hansen writes "New

Testament writers adopted "agape" as the standard word for love.

"Agape didn't make (or describe) the cross. The cross made agape." In other words, the cross redefined *agape* to describe the highest form of love.

Jesus demonstrated this love on the cross. It would cost Him everything. *Agape* love is absolute, un-self-centered, brutal sacrificing love. *Agape* love is based on a decision instead of a feeling.

I'm reading a book right now called "The Liri Valley: Canada's World War 2 breakthrough to Rome." It describes one six month period of Canadian forces in the lesser known Italian campaign up the boot of Italy. The author, Mark Zuehlke, has spent hundreds of hours interviewing veterans, reading regimental diaries and researching histories. He even travelled to the battlefields to gain greater insight into what it was like.

Now I have never experienced combat. I don't know what it's like. I have to trust what others write about it and tell me. But apparently there are constant opportunities for selfishness or self-sacrifice. One incident occurred when a Captain John Joseph Conway saw one forward platoon pinned down by a machine gunner. He

brought four men forward to try to take out the gun. As one of his men started to throw a grenade at the machine gun, he fumbled it. Conway scooped the grenade off the ground to throw it away. But the grenade exploded and tore his right hand off. “Since the explosion’s full force was absorbed by Conway’s hand, nobody else was injured. Ignoring his bleeding arm, Conway led an attack that destroyed the machine gun position. He was awarded the Military Cross for his unhesitating action with the grenade.”¹

That’s a form of self-sacrificing love. Now Captain Conway certainly did something noble. But he did it instinctively and reactively. Jesus went to the cross deliberately. He willingly sacrificed His life with agape love so that human beings might be reconciled to God.

“Agape” love completely differs from eros love which dominated much of Greek thinking then and our world today. One commentator puts it this way. Eros is determined by impulsion towards its object. Agape is a free and decisive act determined by its subject. Eros involves man reaching up for more. Agape involves the

higher reaching down to the lower. Eros seeks others to fulfill life hunger. Agape seeks others to give active love. So Agape is decision love. It is defined by the cross requiring great self-sacrifice on behalf of another. It hurts and can exhaust. But it is the one action that can make profound difference in all sorts of life situations.

It is this understanding of love that we must keep in mind as we travel through 1 Corinthians 13. Now let’s look at the first two descriptions of love.

If you had to come up with a list of words describing love, what might be your number one choice? Love is commitment. Love is passionate. Love is romantic. But verse 4 starts with “Love is patient.”

What is 1 Corinthians 13 patience?

Well it comes from a Greek compound word. Macrothumia. Macro means long. Thumia means suffer. So you can translate the first phrase “Love suffers long. In fact, the old King James version states “charity suffereth long.” To suffer long with someone means hanging in there with them; persevering in love with them even when you don’t

¹ Mark Zuehlke, *The Liri Valley: Canada’s World War 2 Breakthrough to Rome*,

(Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, 2001), 288.

feel like it. Long suffering love bears with those who have exhausted “reasonable” expectations of love.

This patient love means we continue to love even though we suffer through the inconveniences, frustrations and hurts others inflict on us. We might immediately get our backs up. We have every right to write off that person after all the inconvenience or disappointment or hurt they’ve caused. Paul is not saying that you let people get away with stuff. We do speak truth in love. But we don’t stop loving. One way to go forward with long suffering love, we must look back to God’s love for us.

Where might we be if God had not shown a long suffering love with us? We’ve inconvenienced God by our sin. Jesus had to come from heaven to earth. That’s pretty inconvenient. We’ve disappointed God by our return to the same sin. We hurt God and grieve the Holy Spirit when we sin. Yet God offers that suffering long patient love.

Scripture speaks of God offering this kind of love.

2 Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is *patient* with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” In other

words, even though God could have justly ended history hundreds of years ago, He has patiently endured with millions so that they might come to Him for salvation.

Romans 2:4 – “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and *patience*, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you towards repentance?”

Romans 9:22 – “What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with *great patience* the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction?”

God demonstrates His love by holding back his just wrath towards human rebellion. He commands us to offer the same love to the shopping cart like people in our lives. So when we’re ready to throw up our hands, blow up in disgust, or cut all ties, we might remember God’s long suffering love for us. We might remember God patiently loved Joseph for 13 years while he molded him into readiness for second in command of Egypt. God patiently loved Jacob for 20 years until Jacob was finally changed into the man ready to bear the title Israel. God patiently loved Moses for 40 years after Moses

foolishly tried to free the Israelites from Egyptian slavery in his own strength. God continues to offer that longsuffering love to us.

Maybe you are here today convinced that you have burned up all God's love for you. You've turned away too many times. You've done too many terrible things and you believe God has thrown up His hands concerning you. We heard a testimony from the baptismal tank last week of God's merciful patient love offered to one of our candidates. The same God who offered that love to that baptismal candidate, patiently offers you His love. Will you receive it from Him for the first time today? Or will you come back to Him today?

But what about those situations that are more than a minor inconvenience? Is Paul saying we are supposed to patiently endure spousal abuse, verbal abuse and injustice? What if the person oppresses us to the point beyond our ability to bear?

We respond with truth and love. Patient love is not dishonest love. It doesn't say "I'll continue to love you and pretend you didn't hurt me." It says I'll continue to love you and you did hurt me. Its time to change and I'm willing to stick with you. But change must happen.

Everyone gets inconvenienced, frustrated and hurt. Its how we respond to those troubles that reveals much about us. God calls us to respond with a patient long-suffering love like He offered us.

1 Corinthians love is agape love – love that decides to act independent of feelings based on the cross. 1 Corinthians love is long suffering love that commits to hanging in there with people when they blow it.

What is 1 Corinthians 13 kindness?

Paul goes on to describe another aspect of love in the second phrase of verse 4.

Love is "kind." Now at first glance, this seems pretty weak doesn't it? "Oh we're supposed to be kind, nice to everyone." That's not very strong or appealing. But this word for kind allows for no measure of weakness. The word originally meant useful. Then useful actions came to be called "kind actions." Then kind actions gained a moral force meaning acts of goodness on behalf of others. So 1st

Corinthians 13 kindness is seeing a need and then acting to meet that need.

This kindness can make a huge difference in relationships.

Say there has been some tension between a husband and wife. The husband comes home to see his wife harrassed by the children and way behind on the house work. Supper is not yet ready.

He does not yet know that a friend dropped in that really needed to talk making supper late. Nor does he know that one of the kids had trouble at school and another has been defiant towards Mom for the last hour.

He could explode. He's had a rough day at the office. He's hungry and the last thing he needs is more chaos. Instead he rolls up his sleeves and gets to work. He deals with the defiant child taking it out of the kitchen so Mom can have some peace. He gets the other kids to join him in catching up on the housework. He sets the table for supper and offers to peel potatoes. Kindness saw some needs and acted on them. Healing came to that relationship later that night.

Kindness can make a huge difference at work. You can enhance working relationships by taking into account another person's needs to do a good job rather than simply demanding that they perform. Kindness can make a huge difference in a community.

That's what we're looking at through Jericho Road focus. God calls us to go way beyond kind smiles to kind actions.

The Bible uses this term to describe God. We already saw it in Romans 2:4, Titus 3:3-6: "At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." God didn't look down from heaven, see our desperate plight and have warm feelings of compassion for us. He did something about it. He saw our need and sent Jesus His Son to die.

How can we show kindness to others? 10th century preacher Jonathan Edwards again offers us some ideas of what this kind love looks like. When we spur each other on in our spiritual lives, we show kindness. We can teach, counsel and warn from the Scriptures. Kindness is stirring each other up in passion for Christ or praying for someone in need. We show kindness when we call someone taking a destructive path off that path.

Edwards writes “Saints, too, may be the instruments of comforting and establishing one another, strengthening one another in faith and obedience, raising one another out of spiritual doldrums and helping one another out of temptations. We show kindness when we encourage one another through darkness and trial.

But we also show kindness when we show others mercy and meet their needs. Many are hungry or thirsty, or strangers or in need of clothes or in prison or suffering. We show kindness by showing up at grads and for birthday parties. We show kindness by actually supporting that sponsor child or sitting down to write that letter. Edwards notes when we engage in these merciful acts towards others, we have greater opportunity to offer our testimony and Christ to those who know nothing of Him.

Many of you have shown this kind love. You’ve seen a need and acted on it – marriage in trouble; meals; prayer; cards; flowers; helping out with a newborn; Its so exciting for me to see the people of this church family out and about seeing needs and acting on them.

Friends, do you see that when you offer this kind of love, you fulfill 1

Corinthians 13 love in God’s strength. God is using you to spread His love to the people you reach out to.

How can we receive God’s power to offer this love to others?

Well its not easy. In fact, it’s contrary to our sinful nature. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious – Selfish ambition; hatred; discord; greed – acting in our own best interests.

But this love was perfectly shown to us and given to us by God. So we must

- First we must receive that Agape Love ourselves from God. He Himself demonstrated this kind of love. He sent His Son to the cross to pay for our sins. He has waited at least until this moment before He judges the world. God offers that same long suffering and kind love to you. God’s love is kind. If you had a harsh earthly father, do not project that onto God. God’s kindness is overflowing and abundant. And He reaches out in that love to you today. God is patient not wanting anyone to perish. He has preserved the world to

this day so that you might hear His call to return to Him or put your trust in Him for the very first time.

- Then rejoice in the kindness the Lord has shown.
- Finally by His strength and the Spirit's work, open yourself up to let these "fruits of the Spirit" grow in our lives. During a visit one of the folks in hospital, I went over to the window to look at cards, flowers from you, words of encouragement help in loneliness

Yes people are like shopping carts – inconvenient, frustrating and hurtful. We were the same to God stubbornly turning the opposite way. Yet He kept hanging on and sticking with us. He didn't slam us back into the corral in frustration. He patiently and kindly loves. So will you join me in first reaching up receive His long suffering and kind acting love. (Hands up) Then pour out that same love out to the shopping cart people in our lives.