

## **love is eternal**

1 Corinthians 13:8-10

February 19, 2017

Love is eternal ...

This next Saturday afternoon, Erin Brock and Josh Medhus will be married in our sanctuary. Bob and Pat, Erin's parents, will be there. Terry and Lorna, Josh's parents will be there. Lynne and I will be there. But Erin so wishes that her grandpa, Harold Brock, was still living and could be there, too, to share this special moment with her. But he will be there! Because love is eternal.

Every Sunday as we gather in this sanctuary for worship, we have the pleasure and the privilege of seeing all the faces of those we know and love. But there are other faces here, too, other faces we know and love: Bill and Jean Stevens, John Stevens, Bob Sheridan, Russ and Donna Lauterbach, Frank Heinick, Jean Kimball, Meg Allbaugh. They are here, too, aren't they? Because we hold them still in our hearts. Because our history here is so entwined with their histories. Because we love them. Because love is eternal.

She is dying. You count every day a blessing, a bonus. She is dying, but you hold tight to her still, grateful for every moment you have yet with her. But as precious as each moment is and as much as you want her days never to come to an end, you do not fear death and neither does she. Because love is eternal.

This world is a daunting place. These times are daunting times. I see too much, hear too much, know too much, too much that breaks my heart, too much that makes me angry, too much that leaves me aghast, appalled, discouraged, disheartened. But I do not give up! I do not stop protesting. I do not stop letting my voice be heard as small and insignificant as it is. I do not stop hoping for justice, hoping for mercy, hoping for compassion. I do not stop believing, believing that love will overcome hate, that love will overcome fear. Because love is eternal.

He came bringing light, but they preferred the darkness. He came speaking truth, but they didn't want to hear it. He came the very embodiment of the love of God, but they killed him, and we ignore him. But he lives. He lives still, still bringing light, still embodying love. Because love is eternal.

And the power that raised him to life is at work in us, enlivening our spirits, invigorating our bodies, stirring up courage, igniting passion, exposing our folly and our sin and forgiving them, opening our eyes to see God, opening our eyes to see each other. We are being transformed. We are being saved. We are being born again, because God loves us and love is eternal.

Love is eternal. What else is eternal? Not much!

*There are inspired messages, but they are temporary; there are gifts of speaking in strange tongues, but they will cease; there is knowledge, but it will pass ...*

Paul is making a list of their favorite things: inspiration, knowledge, spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church was giddy with the power of the Spirit, enamored of the charismatic expressions of their newfound faith, proud of their special spiritual abilities. They loved to pray ecstatically in strange tongues. They loved to pass on personal messages from the Lord. They loved to see and know the things the Holy Spirit revealed to them. It was exciting, exhilarating, empowering, ennobling, especially for people that were used being at the bottom of the social barrel. But Paul cautions them: these things don't matter. They are temporary, passing, partial.

Love matters. You may be able to speak the languages of angels, you may be the best of preachers, you may understand mysteries that no one else can fathom, you may have faith enough to ... move mountains -- but without love, none of it matters. Love matters. Love counts. Love -- love alone -- is eternal.

What are your favorite things? What are you proud of? Your wisdom, your talent, your skill? Your accomplishments, your good investments, your good reputation? Your church, your business, your country? These things don't really matter. All these things are temporary, fleeting, not lasting.

What is lasting? What is eternal? Not much!

Not you. Not me. We will pass away.

Not this church. Not this nation. They will one day be gone.

Not any tree, not any mountain, not any river. Not this earth, not our sun, not the stars, not the universe itself. All of it is temporal, temporary, impermanent. All of it will pass away.

But love is eternal. Do you understand what this means? It means that love is bigger than the universe itself, not bound by it or bound within it. Love exists before it exists and love exists still after it is gone. It is not that love comes into being once the universe contains beings that are capable of love, but the reverse: the universe itself comes into being because of love!

That thought astonishes me, the thought that love comes before, that the primary impulse behind swirling gasses and colliding galaxies, behind the long arc of evolution and history, behind animals struggling to survive and human beings struggling for meaning ... is love. Martin Luther King said that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice" and he is right. But there's more. The arc of the physical universe, the whole of time and space, bends towards love and comes from love.

Love is eternal. But how can love be eternal? Love is by definition relational. For love to exist you need a lover and you need the beloved. The lover is God and the beloved are we.

God didn't create love. God is love. Love is as long as God is. God is eternal, so love is eternal. But because love is eternal and because we are the beloved, God will not give us up. God loves us still and always and makes us the promise -- for our sake and for God's sake -- the promise of eternal life.

Eternal life. That is the promise God makes:

*God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.*

But I must tell you, "eternal life" is a tough concept to get my mind around. It seems so abstract, so "out there, who knows where?," so unrelated to where we are and what we are thinking about here and now. I don't think about forever, do you? I'm thinking about this afternoon or tomorrow morning or next week or next summer or next year, but not about forever.

And yet, the first meaning of eternal life is not about forever, but about now, not about quantity of life, but quality of life. It's about now, this moment.

That is what we have, that is all we have -- this moment -- and it is love, love alone, that gives this moment meaning, lasting meaning, eternal meaning. Love that is patient and kind. Love that is not jealous or proud. Love that is not selfish or irritable. Love that does not keep a record of wrongs. Love that is happy and only happy with the truth. Love that never gives up. In the whole of your life, this is all that lasts, this is all that matters -- the love you have for someone, for some "one" in this moment.

We know that! What is it that we celebrate at every single memorial service when try to name the meaning of a life as a whole? It is love! We don't come to list accomplishments or to rehearse victories, or, if we do, the celebration suddenly feels hollow and lifeless. No, we come to celebrate his love for us and our love for him. We come to celebrate her love for us and her love for her neighbors and her love for her God and how each of those loves remain with us still because she loved us, because God loved us through her, because love is eternal.

Love is eternal. You don't need money. You don't need power. You don't need a break. You don't need opportunity. You don't need success. You don't need to leave a legacy. All you need in life is this one moment. All you need is love in this one moment, and your life, both now and forever, will mean something, and your life will matter, and you will know God, because God is love.