

Sunday, December 8, 2019  
Rev. Jessica Paulsen  
FPC, Corning  
Isaiah 61:1-4  
Philippians 4:1-9

### *Learning Love*

This morning we're going to start with a question—what does love mean to you? What is love? What does love look like? How do we know love? How do we show love?

*Give time for people to answer—explain the answers a bit and so on.*

So, that's what love means for some us here. Okay...second question...how do you know that? How do you know that is what love means? How do you know that is what love looks like?

*More time for people to think about it and possibly answer.*

I ask that second question because I really want us to think about something this morning, something we see a glimpse of in our passages from Isaiah and Philippians, which is the sharing and the receiving of the good news, the learning of the good news, of what God's love is, and the impact that sharing and receiving and learning has on each of our lives.

In these verses from Philippians, Paul is encouraging the community to support and help each other and he ends the passage with specific instructions on how to do that: "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me..." (4:9, NRSV). They are to follow his example—he has worked to pass on to them the word he received from Jesus, from God, to teach them, and now Paul is reminding them that is how they love and support each other—by thinking about and acting on what is honorable, just, pure, and commendable. These are the ways in which they are to show and share in the love of God.

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Now, if only everyone in the world knew these things and lived this way—perhaps we wouldn't have so many problems. Except...except...it's exactly in the sharing, receiving, and learning of the good news, that the problems originate. Let me explain.

We all came up with what we consider to be fairly standard, universally understood definitions of love. But here are some more definitions of love that exist in our world...

- Love is when he hits me because this means he's paying attention. I might have done something wrong...but he noticed and is loving me so I can get it right.
- Love is making fun of each other—teasing, calling names, etc. If they didn't care, they'd just ignore me, so they love me—even if sometimes what they say hurts. They're showing me they love me.
- Love is always telling everyone else what they're doing wrong—so they can do better. If I didn't love them so much, I wouldn't criticize everything they do.
- Love is teaching right from wrong, good from bad and if we have to do that with yelling, spanking, hitting, or other types of punishment, then that's what we'll do.

Because we love them, and they have to know what is right and what is wrong.

And yes, you might be shaking your head at these, saying that really isn't love. But you, we, only know that isn't love because we've been taught differently. The good news was shared in a way that taught us the truth of Paul's words in Corinthians—that love is patient and kind and generous. If your only experience of love is hitting or teasing or criticism or punishment, and that is what you've learned love is, then how are you going to show someone you love them? By hitting, teasing, criticizing, or punishing—because that is your entire understanding of how to express love and what love means.

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And this is where the church, the community of Christ in the world, has a role to play—because we can share with and teach others God’s meaning of love. We can stop this cycle of violence and damage in the name of love by showing the world a different way, God’s way.

This is what Isaiah is offering to the people in the passage today—love and hope that will bring about a repaired and reunited world. God sent the prophet, and God sends us to bind up the wounds of the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty and freedom, to demonstrate kindness and love no matter what. This is the love we need to learn, and this is the love we need to teach—God’s unconditional, unending love.

Every time we welcome someone into the family of God with the Sacrament of Baptism, that is the promise we make. We are asked as members of the church of Jesus Christ, do we promise to guide and nurture that person by word and deed, **with love** and prayer. Even the children are asked will you help that person remember that God loves them, and we love them. We promise to love—to love as God has taught us to love, not as the world has taught us to love.

So, this Advent, as we continue to wait and prepare, may we learn even more about God’s love and how to teach and share that love with others.