

## 1 Corinthians 13

One time, a few years ago, this reading from Corinthians was the given text for the week, and I had a sermon all ready. Then, Friday night of that week, I had volunteered to be a chaperone at the local school for the Junior High dance. My niece and nephew, who were living with me, were in Junior high at the time.

There I was, with some parents, in the gym. Three hours of walking around, back and forth through a gym full of 13 year olds, with the music blasting them and us into the other-world that is the junior high dance.

It seemed to me at that time, that ...there, in that gymnasium, was a microcosm of human living: there were the haves and the have-nots, the popular ones, and the ones you just knew were not going to be asked to dance – ever –

There were groups dancing together – some inviting others in, but some pretty closed  
Some choosing not to join a group even when invited

Others wanting desperately to be invited, looking longingly at the groups or couples, yet unable to make a move to become one of them.....

The faces and bodies were a study in hope and disappointment – terror and nonchalance.  
The feelings there were raw and real.

I felt for them, and I respected them and I prayed for them and I would not want to be there gain for the world.

It's hard to be in junior high. We need to keep those kids in our prayers regularly. You might wonder what this has to do with the sermon topic today. It's this:

When the music slowed down, and it was time to slow dance, even though I tried not to stare or to be intrusive, I couldn't help watching them. The awkwardness of being face to face with someone maybe for the first time – not being sure where your arms go....wanting to dance and then the terror of actually doing it –

The fear that you'll trip, or not do something "right" – the fear that your hair is all wrong and you should have worn your other jeans, and what if I have bad breath and what if he doesn't like me and laughs about me with his friends later....

What if I'm not good enough?

What if I'm not good enough?????

What kind of partner am I? What will my partner think and what if I'm not good enough?

And it's that basic fear that causes the false bravado, the doing what everyone else does, the posturing and the – well you know how that terror is covered up....

And the sad part is that often,

Those things don't go away as we get older.

We still yearn to be accepted – we still ache to be loved – and when we step up face to face with someone and we begin to dance the dance of relationship – if we're honest, Our arms are as awkward as any preteen and our hearts beat as fast and the longing in our eyes and hearts is as intense as any kid in junior high. As we begin the first hesitant steps

The need for practice is there, the need for acceptance....  
The ways we cover up our needs just get more sophisticated as we become adult. Maybe.

I like the metaphor of dance to describe the ways humans relate to each other and to God.  
Do you?

My question for today is:

As we dance the dance of life, and as we dance face to face with each other and the world  
and with god,

What does the dance look like? What kind of dancer are you and what is the dance you're  
doing right now? With family...at work...at school.....with partners, or with  
friends...what kind of dance is it you're doing? What about your relationship with God?  
What does that dance look like?

And what kind of dance does God require of us? In other words, what sort of life is God  
dreaming for us, asking of us? Among us here, in our homes, and internationally, among  
nations? What sort of lives....what kind of dance?

Whatever the dance, here's the music – here's the beat.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13 AGAIN

What does it feel like to move to that beat?

This text is often read at weddings. *In fact, one time, I was doing a wedding rehearsal  
and I had asked the couple to choose some scripture. The bride came to me at the  
rehearsal and said "I know you wanted us to pick something from the Bible but I found a  
poem instead I hope you don't mind. It goes like this "If I speak in the tongues of humans  
or angels, but have not love....."*

It certainly has much to say about intimate relationships and marriage partnerships. We'll  
come back to that in a minute.

Paul, however, writes this to a church in the middle of a big fight. He's writing to a  
church where the members are having trouble getting along. Why? Remember last week  
the reading was from the chapter just before this? Paul in that chapter goes on (and on  
and on) about how the church is a body, and we're all part of the body even if we're  
different. This chapter is still part of that discussion. The Corinthians were playing "I'm  
the King of the castle" in their church. "I'm more spiritual than you are". And Paul is  
NOT, to say the very least, amused.

That's the kind of dance where one person always leads or where there's a star dancer and  
the rest of us are in the chorus line because we don't quite measure up.

Paul says NO. NOT IN THIS CHURCH. Not in the body of Christ.

Here, we all count.

No one's gifts are better, more valuable, more spiritual. In particular, there were those who felt that because they spoke in tongues, or had special secret knowledge of the scriptures, they were better than the rest.

And this passage is SO good because Paul writes to them and says

You can speak in tongues all you want  
You can be theologically correct  
And you can know your bible inside out –  
But if you're not a loving person WHO CARES? GOD CERTAINLY DOESN'T.  
But if you're not a loving person FORGET IT.  
None of that is any good if it's not handled with love.

To play the game you're playing, to go for power and control because of your so-called gifts...is childish. And you should have grown up long ago. We're not in the gym any more. We're not 13 trying to impress our friends...  
Life is not about competition; it's not about winning at the expense of someone else.  
That's the trouble with "I'm the king of the castle" because in that game, what's the next line?  
Right  
"And you're the dirty rascal". When you start playing that someone always ends up being the dirty rascal.  
THERE ARE NO DIRTY RASCALS IN THIS PLACE.

It's not about being correct or in control or better than others  
No matter how much you know, or don't know,  
To pretend to know the full truth is a fool's game – it's childish. Grow up – grow into what God calls you to be – grow into love.

Those words are the music to our dance.  
We're called to dance face to face with respect. To be brothers and sisters together in a church where we have dignity, and choices  
Equal access to power,  
And where we don't have to be afraid of making a wrong step, because when I do, or you do, when I make a mistake,  
I know that my brothers and sisters will be here for me, not judging but helping and supporting me. And I know that if I dance with different steps from yours, you'll clap your hands and appreciate my dance while doing your own.

All of that can apply to friendships, international relations, and intimate ones. I don't know how that fits in your life, but there are a couple of things I want to say about this when it comes to intimate relationships; marriages, partnerships.  
The first is this: these words are meant for both parties. I once heard a sermon on marriage based on this text, and mostly on verse 7

And the effect of that sermon was to convince a friend of mine who was being beaten by her partner, to stay in the relationship to never give up. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things endures all things the Bible says.

LISTEN TO ME.

NOBODY, NOBODY should stay where they are being abused. That is the absolute opposite of love. Love directs that YOU as well as others need and deserve respect and real love, dignity, power, choices and control over your life. (now I'm not talking about the ups and downs in any healthy relationship. Always, there are times in intimate lives when things are more intense than others. That's normal. That's fine. I'm talking about abuse; emotional, verbal, physical, financial.... Love in marriage needs to be mutual. Respect and safety, dignity and power. Being valued and listened to. When those things are not present, love is not there. Go somewhere where it is.

When it all comes down to it, being partners with someone in marriage, or in a friendship, or working out international relationships or political ones here in Canada or learning to be the body of Christ here in the church....

It all comes down to love. We're really not so different from the junior high kids at a dance

Desperately wanting a friend

Deeply needing to be accepted for who we are

Aching to hear that we're ok and terrified that we're not

Aching to know we're ok; we're accepted and loved

This is as basic as food and drink. For every person that will die today for want of food, there is another who will die for lack of love. It's as basic to our survival as that.

As we take our tentative and awkward steps toward one another

Dancing the dance

We know that the rhythm – the beat – is the steady, lifegiving heartbeat of God

And we can let ourselves go

And move to the music of our lives, unafraid of who is watching

Because the eyes we look into as we move and the arms that reach for our own

Hear the music too

And we're held together by the beat of the love of God

So now faith hope and love abide, these three

AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE