

## Love in Community

### 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 - **Meditation on Love**

This ancient Biblical text is commonly referred to as the love chapter and also frequently the subject of sermons for weddings. But let's not forget that actually Paul didn't write this text for a wedding. He wrote it for a community and so I share my reflection on it today in the context of this community on a membership Sunday. What better time than now to consider the demands of love for a community than when we formally receive others into the covenant relationship we practice with God and each other here at TUMC.

I'd like to note one other thing as I begin: we were hoping that this would be the Sunday – coinciding as it does with the first weekend of the beaches Jazz festival - that we would have some original musical compositions to sing, or play or share with each other because there are numerous composers and/or arrangers among us. (Jeff, Elise, Ryan, Imogen, Michele, Mark, Diem) Alas, that was not to be for this Sunday and we will definitely have to try it again in the fall when more people are available to participate.

All that being said, I have a very brief reflection to share with you that compares the demands and art of love in community as outlined in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, to the demands and art of music and musicianship. I make this comparison humbly knowing that there are many gifted musicians among us.

This text by Paul was possibly one of his most eloquent and insightful passages. Paul wasn't always eloquent (by his own admission) and some would argue that he wasn't always insightful either.

But in this text about the potential and possibility of self-giving love;

About love that wants what is best for the other,

About love that is life-giving and life-altering.

Paul achieved something of transcendence.

I use the word Transcendence in this context to mean something that is so pre-eminently true on all levels that it became timeless and is therefore applicable to generation after generation, community after community. A transcendent experience can mean a moment of connection with the Divine reality we call God and I will talk about that in this reflection as well.

Now, it is safe to say, that we are a congregation that loves our music, whether, listening, singing, composing, arranging, performing – whether, choral or instrumental – and many among us take the art and practice of music and musicianship very seriously. Today I suggest that we consider how we take the art and practice of love in community equally as seriously.

For you see, the art and practice required to achieve a moment of transcendence in music (I'm sure you know or have experienced what I mean - that moment where participation in a piece of music transports us to another realm, that realm where it seems that for a moment we have experienced something of the Divine.) Let me begin again, the art and practice required to achieve a moment of transcendence in music is the same as the art and practice required to achieve a moment of transcendence in relationships within community. It is possible to experience something of the Divine reality in our relationships here in this community and that requires taking seriously the art and practice of love.

Using Paul's words as the jumping off point

Love is many things.

It is first of all patient – just as in music when one cannot hurry the creative process, one cannot hurry the evolution of love in relationships. Relationships require patience and attentiveness so they can grow unhurried. In this way they will achieve their richest possibilities.

Love is kind. It requires tenderness. Just as in music, when the melody and harmonies and or dissonances within the music must be allowed to be what they are for the integrity of the piece, love for the other requires a kindness that allows the other to be who they really are for the sake of integrity in the relationship.

Love rejoices in truth. It is about honesty. I imagine a musician needs to genuinely understand/feel/experience what the music is trying to convey. This honesty between artist and expression is necessary to the integrity of what the hearer will hear. In a safe community we cannot hide what is true within us, nor should we. If we try to hide what is in us, intuitive others will know. It is best for the integrity of the community to be deeply honest with the other.

And finally,

Love endures. It bears all things. It believes all things. It hopes all things. It endures all things. Love never fails.

The art and practice of music requires diligence and tenacity over time.

The practice must endure through good times and bad for the fruits of one's practice to show eventually in performance. In a community, the same diligence and tenacity through good times and bad will eventually bear good fruit.

So patience, tenderness, and honesty, diligence and tenacity: when we bring these qualities to music, life, love and relationships within community, we may, if God chooses to bless our efforts, achieve that moment of transcendence where time stops, all becomes one and we are lifted up into a space where all that is sacred can be granted to human beings. Transcendence: those moments that are never adequately described with words but can only be experienced.

And So, TUMC, in our music, in our lives together in community, I pray for moments of transcendence. The possibility of these moments comes through practice. So let us be patient, let us be tender, let us be honest,

diligent and tenacious and may our hearts and souls be granted frequent access to these sacred moments.