

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT

So, Hallmark has us all geared up for Valentine's Day, right? Chocolates, roses, jewelry? It's the one day a year where you are supposed to shower the one you love with presents. There is only one little problem with that. It's not inclusive - Some of us aren't in a relationship with anyone so they get no flowers, no chocolates, no jewelry, and no romantic dinner. Like Tina Turner says, for them love's just a second hand emotion. But I know how Valentines Day can be celebrated every day – all you need is Love – I know, another song title. What exactly is Love? Is it that warm, touchy feely feeling we get when we are near that special someone? Or is it tears in your eyes when you say the Pledge of Allegiance or sing the Star Spangled Banner.

According to the dictionary it can be a noun - a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person; a verb used with an object such as I love Rick's Sunday music; a verb used without an object such as I am in love; or a verb phrase like Love up Man or as an idiom like being in love with one's work.

According to the bible however, love is caring in action. It isn't what we feel but what we do.

John writes – “Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

Everything that God does is a result of Love. His ultimate love for us is John 3:16 – for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son – to all regardless of who we are. God’s love is not based on the merit of a person – God’s love, agape, is unconditional. Being formed in His image allows the same agape love to flow in us – to give and sacrifice, expecting nothing back in return.

So with all this love around us, we actually have a valentine to celebrate every day – and our gift is better than chocolate or roses – it’s someone to love and who loves us right back. A love that means no matter where we are or what we do, God’s love is with us!!! Nothing is better than that, right? With God’s love, kind of quoting the Beatles here – ***There's nothing we can do that can't be done. Nothing we can sing that can't be sung. There's nothing we can know that isn't known. Nothing we can see that isn't shown.***

Love is such a wonderful thing to talk about and no one describes it better than Paul does in 1st Corinthians 13.

While most people think these verses are for weddings, they were really meant as a rebuke to the church in Corinth who were more enamored of their gifts than to the God who gave them. He starts out chastising them for their love of speaking in tongues.

If they only speak in the tongues of men and angels, they are nothing but a clanging cymbal or a resounding gong. Empty chatter. If they want to prophesy and can see through to every mystery but have no love, they have nothing but empty dreams. If they give to the poor and do great deeds without love, they gain no standing with God.

Let's look at these verses to see what love looks through Paul eyes. Or really through God's eyes. In fact, we could substitute God for the word Love. God is patient, God is kind. So we need to be kind to those people we know who are quick to take offense or somehow always twist what you say to put you in the wrong? Unfortunately we all know people like that – sometimes it's us!

I'm reminded of an old cartoon – I think it has Charlie Brown pleading with Lucy to be more loving because its love that makes pthis world a better place.

Like usual, she clocks him saying, “Look you blockhead, I do love the world – it's the people I can't stand.” Being a Christian isn't for sissies.

Paul then goes on to remind us just what love isn't supposed to be. God is not jealous – Isn't it human nature to want more out of life and feel envy when we see others who have more? It's hard for jealousy and love to exist in the same heart.

And love isn't boastful, arrogant or rude. Love in action should build people up without the need to brag, or be arrogant or rude. What does love have to do with that? Nothing because only despair and loneliness can exist without love.

God doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing. Instead He rejoices in the truth. I remember when my sister used to tell on me when we were kids. She couldn't wait to rat me out until it came time for the consequences. Then she would feel terrible and plead with my mom not to spank me then get in-between us if all else failed. She rejoiced in my wrong doing but I always wished she wouldn't have rejoiced in telling the truth!

God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. God's love never ends. Prophecies will end, tongues will cease, knowledge will come to an end but when the end comes, we will know all.

Paul lets us know that while we experience our life on earth, we are limited in our understanding. In fact, the love Paul describes is a love beyond our human ability - well at least it's beyond mine. It's only when we leave this world that things become clear. That's when we will have no need for the gifts of prophecy or speaking in tongues because when we see God face to face, only love will exist.

Now we have faith and hope and love, but the greatest of these is love. Love unites us personally with God and through God's love we are enabled to love one and other. In other words, a valentine every day.

There are so many references to Love in our world. Augustine of Hippo says, "What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the signs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like." Ray Bradbury says, "At the center of religion is love. I love you and I forgive you. I am like you and you are like me. Everything in our life should be based on love. But my favorite is what Mother Teresa says, "Spread love everywhere you go; first of all in your house. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next door neighbor. Let no one ever come to you without leaving feeling better.

I grew up not believing in God. I knew about Him because my Grandmother was a devout Baptist and would talk to me about God when we visited. My father, however, believed that the bible was a great piece of literature; and maybe, just maybe if there was a God, he had to be an alien being from outer space with amazing and awesome powers to do all those miracles .

When I was 12, a Methodist church was built in my neighborhood and I was drawn to it. I attended confirmation classes and was baptized at 13. I went to church all through my teens, even after moving to Michigan when I was 16. I even went to Wednesday morning services at an Episcopal church with friends. But when I was 18, I was involved in a terrible accident and lost my faith. While living in South Norwalk some 20 years later, I started attending First UMC at the urging of a friend and the rest is history. Brec and I were married 25 years ago by our South Norwalk Methodist minister in our back yard here in Milford and First became our dearly loved church family until it closed. It took some grieving time, but here we are.

I think the main reason I've remained a Methodist is our long history of concern for social justice.

Wesley and the early Methodists expressed their opposition to slavery, smuggling, inhumane prison conditions, alcohol abuse and child labor.

Today through our love for God, we are encouraged to have a passion for justice and mercy. We feed the hungry, visit the sick and those in prison and advocate for the poor and underprivileged. We even have a Book of Social Principles.

While not considered church law, it is a prayerful and thoughtful effort by the General Conference to apply our Christian vision of righteousness to social, economic and political issues. It's love in action. We provide witness and action on issues of human well-being, justice and peace. Some things mentioned in the Social Principles include our commitment to advocate for best practice energy resources utilization, regulations to protect the life and health of man and animal alike; to protect our food supply, to insure the equality of all persons, to deplore the acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or economic status. We stand for the rights of children, young people and the aged, men and women, immigrants, and persons with disabilities. Our New York Bishop Thomas Bickerton recently held a day of action to take compassion to the streets where there are large immigrant populations as an example of Methodist social justice in action. As a product of the Woodstock generation, I am very proud to be a Methodist.

I am also proud to be a member of this church. The love you have shown me has sustained me in many circumstances.

The love shown to others in our community through our missions and monthly dinners and continual donations of food for both man and animals overwhelm me.

The love shown in creating prayer shawls, our prayer and healing service, our anointing, and our care for our elderly and infirm fill my heart to overflowing. Paul's description of love in action is alive and well at Mary Taylor and I'm so grateful to have such a church family.

Today more than ever our world needs love. In the face of racism, bigotry, prejudice, and intolerance, only love can prevail. It's through love, we can heal the ills that threaten our peace and security. It's through love we achieve the miracles we so fervently hope for. Only love can end terrorism, wars, greed and hunger – Love is ultimately Peace. As Willa Cather says, "Where there is the greatest love, there are always miracles. With enough love, we can change the world because Love is the ultimate miracle.

What's love got to do with it – I say everything.

Let us pray: Dear Creator in Love, thank you so much for your love that surrounds us. We ask that you continue to work within us to help us better love our neighbors for they have the same fears, hopes, needs and desires as we do. Fill our hearts to overflowing with kindness and patience. Instill in us the love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes and things and endures all things until we see you face to face and fully know all things. In gratitude for all your gifts and tender mercies, we open our hearts to love through your son Jesus Christ. Amen