

Sunday, May 24th, 2020
Mantua Center Christian Church
MCCC Home Worship

You will need:

A candle and match
Bible
Paper
Bread and Juice (if desiring communion)

Order of Worship

WELCOME PANEL on the Video

- Welcome to Worship
- Today you can gather
 - *A candle and match*
 - *Bible*
 - *Bread and Juice (if desiring communion)*

GREETING & CALL to WORSHIP - CHAD

The Peace of the Risen Christ be with you. Welcome to worship this week with the Mantua Center Christian Church. Together...we are seeking to have Open Minds, Open Hearts, and Open Arms to live and love like Jesus.

On this day we are talking about LOVE in ACTION.

- Exploring together what love really looks like.
- What are love's distinguishing characteristics.
- How might we love in the way the scripture's proclaim and in harmony with God's call?

So....Family in Christ, let's turn our minds and hearts from other things and light a candle to remind us of God's abiding presence.

Light a Candle

OPENING SCRIPTURE - Mark 12:28-34 - Chad

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?'
²⁹ Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;
³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."
³¹ The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'
³² Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other";
³³ and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the

understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”,— this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’³⁴When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ After that no one dared to ask him any question.

MOMENT with ALLY

INVITATION to GIVE - Pastor Chad

As we think about Love in Action today we remember that our love is not just immediate or local. But goes beyond ourselves and out into the world. Far-reaching and global.. When we put our heart and mind to loving God’s creation through this Pandemic, we remember those near and far to keep perspective on how life has been deeply impacted for so many people.

The Associated Press writer, Tom Odula, recently shared a story about a woman named Judith Andeka and her five children in Nairobi, Kenya. These are his words of description:

NAIROBI, KENYA



Judith Andeka. (AP Photo/Brian Inganga)

Judith Andeka has seen tough times before.

The 33-year-old mother of five lost her husband two years ago and was left to make ends meet on just \$2.50 to \$4 a day from washing clothes in Nairobi’s Kibera, one of the world’s biggest slums.

But things were never as tough as they are now.

Neighbors aren’t going to work because of restrictions on movement, so they can’t afford her services. Even if they could, they don’t want her handling their laundry due to virus concerns.

“I haven’t had a good day for the last two weeks,” Andeka said.

She's been forced to send all five kids to live with relatives who are slightly better off: "I had no choice, because how do you tell a 2-year-old you have no food to give them?"

Like many others in Kibera, home to an estimated 300,000 to 800,000 people, Andeka wakes up early and rushes to a food aid distribution point to try her luck. Crowds often overwhelm the aid workers in their desperation, and men with sticks beat them back and police fire tear gas.

Each time she goes out looking for food or a chance to earn, she risks being robbed of the few belongings in her shack of cracked mud walls and rusty iron sheet roof. There's a bed, two mismatched plastic chairs, a thin table, some buckets for collecting water from a communal tap and her two most prized possessions: a small gas burner and an old black-and-white TV.

Just a month ago, it didn't seem life could be any harder. Now she knows otherwise. "It's better for corona(virus) to end and we continue living in hunger," Andeka said. "Hunger is normal."

There are many stories like Judith's around the world. Together we are mindful and do well to pay attention to the ways the pandemic has caused us grief, difficulty, and pain. We can't minimize that. Let's not forget those in our community and world who face challenges we might not be even able to imagine...and try to find ways to respond. Give to organizations who are meeting needs and alleviating suffering here and around the world. Support those who need it most. Let your love move you to action.

PASTORAL PRAYER - Sarah Smith

As we enter into an attitude of prayer, I invite you to find a comfortable praying position. Let your shoulders fall away from your ears. Relax the muscles of your jaw. Take a deep breath in, and out, as we come together in prayer.

God who holds us close, when we face consequences for siding with love do not let us despair. May we be encouraged in our faithfulness and strengthened by the memories of the saints who went before us.

God who shelters our hearts, though others may pass by without noticing, we know each life captures your loving attention. Give us compassion and attention in a fragmented world. Strengthen our hearts so that we can shoulder the pain of a community in crisis, reminding us that even isolated, we are not alone in love. We know that love calls us together in pursuit of Your dreams for our shared lives. That justice may come, and all may rest, and the earth may thrive: this is the work of God. Not for one day, but today, God, we pray.

In this midst of our messy lives, we bring our sufferings and our offerings to you and pray: "Here we are. Here is what we have. Here are our hearts, our bodies, our commitments." We know through your grace, this is enough. We are enough. Continue to assure us that we are

enough and have enough to be reflections of the endless well of your Love in this world today and always.

When the world points us in the direction of despair, through You, we proclaim the truths that have sustained generations: We believe that justice will come. We believe that love can transform. We believe that You will sustain us in our endings and make all things new. Abide with us in the middle of the mayhem, Lord, we pray.

Hear us now, O Lord, as united we pray the prayer that your son taught us, saying, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC - MCCC Choir

SCRIPTURE & SERMON - Sarah Smith

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 from The Passion Translation

If I were to speak with eloquence in earth’s many languages, and in the heavenly tongues of angels, yet I didn’t express myself with love, my words would be reduced to the hollow sound of nothing more than a clanging cymbal.

And if I were to have the gift of prophecy with a profound understanding of God’s hidden secrets, and if I possessed unending supernatural knowledge, and if I had the greatest gift of faith that could move mountains, but have never learned to love, then I am nothing.

And if I were to be so generous as to give away everything I owned to feed the poor, and to offer my body to be burned as a martyr, without the pure motive of love, I would gain nothing of value.

Love is large and incredibly patient. Love is gentle and consistently kind to all. It refuses to be jealous when blessing comes to someone else. Love does not brag about one’s achievements nor inflate its own importance. Love does not traffic in shame and disrespect, nor selfishly seek its own honor. Love is not easily irritated or quick to take offense. Love joyfully celebrates honesty and finds no delight in what is wrong. Love is a safe place of shelter, for it never stops believing the best for others. Love never takes failure as defeat, for it never gives up.

Love never stops loving. It extends beyond the gift of prophecy, which eventually fades away. It is more enduring than tongues, which will one day fall silent. Love remains long after words of knowledge are forgotten. Our present knowledge and our prophecies are but partial, but when love’s perfection arrives, the partial will fade away. When I was a child, I spoke about childish matters, for I saw things like a child and reasoned like a child. But the day came

when I matured, and I set aside my childish ways.

For now we see but a faint reflection of riddles and mysteries as though reflected in a mirror, but one day we will see face-to-face. My understanding is incomplete now, but one day I will understand everything, just as everything about me has been fully understood. Until then, there are three things that remain: faith, hope, and love—yet love surpasses them all. So above all else, let love be the beautiful prize for which you run.

Beloved, it is wonderful to get to bring to you a message that is perpetually on my heart. The passage you heard above is one of the most well known verses in the bible, probably the one most quoted at wedding ceremonies and in general a glimpse at the best of what we know about Love with a capital L.

We have talked many times about what the L word means: how the greeks had many different types of love that are mentioned in different parts of the bible and could refer to loving different folks in our life in different ways: we hardly ever love mac and cheese in the same way we would love our sister, and yet we use those words interchangeably. After many years of thinking about love and all of it's different meanings and uses and translations, I have finally stumbled upon what I think is the most important distinction when it comes to Love and this passage. The way I love my mac and cheese is stagnant and easy: I don't take any risk in loving mac and cheese. When love becomes an action, an investment, and something I have to work at to achieve, that is what I am looking at when it comes to the love mentioned to the people of Corinth.

In the first part of this passage, the word for love comes from the aramaic "hooba" that is a homonym with a word that means "to set on fire". The focus of this passage is what we know as agape love, or all consuming, perfect love. Most christians consider agape love to be something that we can only receive from God; humans tend to come with many pre-existing conditions that make unconditional love hard for us. But when we start to think of this love as a "love on fire" a love that is all consuming and takes time to tend and tame and work to control, how does that reframe the conversation around how we love one another? Who is it that we are supposed to be loving with such a passion?

In that same verse, we can find symbological depth in the image of a clanging gong. For reference, it is important to remember that cymbals and gongs have been used to symbolize the beginnings and ends and significant times for worship for millenia. To reframe this for a modern audience, you can imagine the clanging gong as discordant church bells. However, the deeper context that the writer is trying to convey is something along these lines: "If we speak like angels, but do not exhibit a burning, passionate love, the traditions that have always surrounded the nature of our worship lack the warmth of meaning."

"But, wait!" You say, "Sarah! This passage is about love, not church tradition!" On the surface, you're right. These verses are telling us about how to love and not to love at the same time,

and for our culture and context, we tend to break off into nuclear, heteronormative monogamous relationships where you show the most understandable type of love to your partner. And I am very much not saying that it is wrong to do so. What I am saying is that this letter was not written for a specific couple to be better married, it was talking about how we run the church with love.

We can take a look at how this develops in the rest of the passage as there is a list of things that, if done without love, become moot. If we have the gift of prophecy and a profound understanding of God, without having love, we simply would not be. If we had faith that moved mountains, and here the Greek present infinitive indicates a continuous aspect, which means a faith to keep on removing mountains or to remove one mountain after another we would be nothing. Now literally, if we are without love, we could cease to be, but this could also be a directive about the gifts and sending of the church. If we could clearly see Godself and have the strongest of strong faiths, without the act of love, the church is nothing.

We can continue on this way throughout the rest of the passage: if we, as a church, collect charity but do not give from a place of love, or burn ourselves for a cause without engaging in it from a stance of love, we gain nothing. We haven't put the hard work in of loving as an action to gain anything, or so the writer is telling the ancient church. While it could seem harsh to us, it is important to note that the church in Corinth was arguing over many comparatively petty things. Today we could think of it as whether to immerse or sprinkle, move the flowers to the front of the room or the back of the sanctuary, whether to have one recessional song before the benediction or one afterwards, and the writer felt that the church had a bigger problem or a focus question for the church: how have you involved love as an action. Whatever it is you decide to do, whatever gift your church was given, whatever makes your group unique, are you prioritizing love first? Are you being patient not just with each other but with the groups around you? Are you celebrating honesty or rooting down in traditions built without love? Are you creating a space that is so filled with love that ALL feel invited to come to the table?

Most churches today would say that they've got a pretty firm handle on love. We certainly say we love each other, but do we put in the work to actually love each other? Do we have an agape love, or a mac and cheese love? How do we know?

Well luckily for us, the writer gives us a list, and while it is a daunting list if you look at it from the perspective of just the individual, it becomes more manageable if you think of the entirety of the church carrying out these acts of love to BE the church.

I have seen so many folks very down, myself included, about the extended absence from the church building. I miss the easy love. I miss walking into the building and getting hugs and catching up over coffee and walking out under Pastor Len's "Give Em' Heaven" sign to remind me that we are supporting a cause bigger than ourselves. All these little things make me feel isolated and like the church is stagnant and like the love has waned in comparison to what we

had. However, I have begun to recognize that I am seeing the church from a shallow place, that easy surface level love. We, as a church, have been pushed into living that agape love even and especially in the midst of this crisis.

I have seen acts of patience and kindness in the ease in which we have transitioned to a new routine of the church. We meet each other as best we can, from wherever we are in the world through technology and letter writing and mask making and parades. We have stepped up to share what we have; I have seen us humble the image of the church, stepping away from the church building to BE the church through gifts of food and paying others bills and making sure that no one around feels like the least of these. And I continue to see love as an action in our conversations about reopening the building. In our push back to that easy love, I have watched us make sure that before we rush in, we make sure that the decision won't negatively impact our elderly, our immunocompromised, our youngest ones. This part of the verses usually ends with love bears all things, endures all things, but can be better translated into the verb form of the word "roof" meaning love protects all things, love enfolds and shelters from exposure. We do the hard actions of staying sheltered in place at home to show our love by sheltering others.

The true end of the passage goes on to say that we will not always have the gifts mentioned in the first third: we do not always have the strength to move mountains or the gift of understanding God, but love abides. Love is the great constant. Love is certainly something we feel, but, moreso, it is the guiding action of the church: We do all things in love. Like the writer to the church in Corinth, I don't claim to know what is going to happen in the next few months when it comes to seeing each other back in the church building, but I do know that I am hopeful that if we continue to act with love as our northern star, the church will still be the church when we meet again. As the passage says: let love be the beautiful prize for which you run, until and past when we are able to gather again. Amen.

COMMUNION

Meditation and Prayer - Katie Baird

Communion Song - "Bread of Heaven" sung by Joy Wyatt

Words of Institution - Chad Delaney

CLOSING HYMN

BENEDICTION - Sarah

Thank you for joining us here at Mantua Center for worship this week! If you were a part of the weekly watchparty, Hi Hello! So good to see you connecting with us in such a new and blessed way. Our church is full of talents and connection and love.

If you are new to Mantua Center and would like to see more videos, click on the bell or the subscribe button down below to stay on top of when we post new videos. If MCCC is old hat to

you, and you are missing some points of connection, why not try one of the Zoom groups throughout the week? We have one at 11 on Sundays, one at 6:30 on Tuesday, one at 2:00 on Wednesdays, and one in the Evening on Thursday. Check out the email from Pastor Chad for more details about the nature of those meetings.

As our benediction today, I would like to offer the following Celtic sending prayer as benediction today: God bless the corners of this house and all the lintel blessed,
And bless the hearth and bless the board and bless each place of rest,
And bless each door that opens wide to strangers as to kin,
And bless each crystal window pane that lets the starlight in,
And bless the roofree overhead and every sturdy wall.
The peace of man. The peace of God. With peace and love for all.

BENEDICTION SONG - "Brighten Your Corner" by Jon Secaur