

“Feeling the Love”

1 Corinthians 13:1-8a, 13; Luke 4:21-30

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It used to be said... maybe still is... that there were TWO things that one did not discuss in ‘polite’ company: **religion** and **politics**. And there is little doubt that the quickest way for a conversation to turn anxious... if not downright heated ...is to discuss one of those two. Case in point: one simple four-letter word: **W-A-L-L**. And NO, we are NOT going to talk about that one here! The reason I bring up that divisive nature of religion and politics is today’s passage from Luke.

In the very beginning of that reading, it said that **“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.”** (Luke 4:22) And then, in a matter of minutes/verses, we read that **“When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.”** (Luke 4:28) SO MUCH SO were they ‘filled with rage,’ that it goes on to say that **“They got up, drove him out of town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.”** (Luke 4:29) Wow. Quite a change in attitude, eh? From ‘favorite son’ to ‘favorite TARGET’ in a blink! Sure does pack a lot of ‘baggage’ into that simple word **“this”** which the people heard, doesn’t it?

But you and I ourselves ‘heard’ the **“this”** referred to! When those ‘who spoke so well of him’ because of their ‘amazement’ at his ‘gracious words’ ALSO expressed equal bewilderment... **“Is not this Joseph’s son?”**... Jesus had a quick response. He immediately accused them of going to ask him to do the same miracles there that He had done elsewhere. ‘Hey, Jesus, old ‘homeboy,’ you’ve really made a name for yourself. Now that you’ve hit the big time, remember us, your ‘peeps,’ and do some of those great things for US. After all, you ARE ‘one of us’... good Jewish boys and girls that we are!’

Then Jesus continues with an even stronger rebuke that selfishness. He speaks of (OTHER) great Hebrew prophets, Elijah and Elisha, and of how the great ministry and miracles that they accomplished were NOT for Israelites, but rather, for a widow in Sidon (ancient Phoenician port city) and Naaman the Syrian... two **Gentiles**.

WHAT!?! God would favor Gentiles over Jews? Heresy! After all, the Jews were the ‘Chosen People,’ right? Did God not speak directly to Abraham, Moses, and David, establishing

the nation of Israel as His covenant people? We were established for a specific purpose by God; foreordained, predestined to be a great nation. If this MAN from within our own clan of descendants denies our favored status, then he is a traitor, delusional, a heretic. He needs to be disposed of!

CRAZY, right? Well, how different is this than the “divine right of kings,” established by the Stuarts in 16th C. England? That rulers derive their right to do so directly from God, and are accountable only to Him. Cannot we, as a ‘Christian nation,’ believe ourselves to be superior to those countries who are NOT? Have not leaders of nations throughout history claimed superiority because of their confident claim, “God is on our side?”

Applying that thought to our own country... that by our ‘status’ as a ‘Christian nation,’ God is going to favor us in all we do... we would need to consider just what constitutes *being* a Christian nation... perhaps, the highest percentage of Christians? Well, according to a 2015 survey, there are at least **70** countries in the world who have a higher percentage of their population that practice Christianity than we do. Amongst those with at least 10 million adherents, we don’t even make the top 10!

OK, that being said, you might argue, ‘But how many of those *practice* their religion; how many really GO to church? Surely we must rate pretty highly in church attendance!’ Survey said... we rank somewhere around **32nd** in the world... roughly tied with our neighbors to the south, **Mexico**. Ironic, right? Curious of just what that percentage of Christians on average are sitting in a pew on Sunday? About **47%**. Roughly HALF. And that’s just about where our congregations ‘sits’...

My point? What Jesus got in so much trouble for... what He said for which He would definitely NOT be ‘**feeling the love**’... is that our favor with God is NOT simply tied to our ‘party affiliation.’ It’s not because we call ourselves ‘American,’ or ‘Israelite’... it’s not because we claim to be ‘Christian’ or ‘Jew.’ Our status in God’s eyes is not a matter of our ‘national state,’ but rather, our **SPIRITUAL state**. Are we truly ‘practicing what we preach?’ How do others KNOW that we are truly followers of the one True God... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Because we tell them that we belong to XYZ Church? Because we have a fish or cross sticker on our car?

OR, do they know that we are Christians because they are **FEELING the love** of Christ through US... LOVE that can only come through Him?

Paul's 'LOVE chapter' to the church in Corinth is a reminder of all the ways that we can think are important to SHOW our true character as Christ's followers. Our Christian faith is not simply demonstrated by how well we "**speak**"... how much we "**understand**"... how much we "**give away**"... how much we **sacrifice**. It's not even about how much "**faith**" that we have. In the Great Apostle's words,

"If I do not have love, I gain nothing... I AM nothing." (1 Cor. 13:2, 3)

For a change, I am NOT going to 'wax eloquent' in 'expanding' on all that this passage means. (I'm sure that I could probably get at least ONE 'Amen,' right?) Let's call this your '*homework assignment*.' I challenge each one of you to go back to your 'quiet place'... whatever that is ☺... and consider just how YOU are expressing the LOVE of Christ in your daily lives. Think about the daily interactions you have with your spouse, your children, your co-workers, your friends and fellow church members; how do you interact with those people who you DON'T know very well... strangers you may encounter in the store, at your workplace, behind a steering wheel. ☺ How do YOU... yes, and I... show God's love that is **patient... kind... not envious** or **boastful** or **arrogant** or **rude**. Do we bear witness to a Christian LOVE that does NOT **insist on its own way**; it is NOT **irritable** or **resentful**? Do we demonstrate a LOVE that does NOT **rejoice** in **wrongdoing**, but **rejoices in the truth**? I don't know about you, but there are a few of these that I can fall pretty short on... daily...

As I consider all of the experiences... the PEOPLE... in life that make it HARD to Let them 'feel the love,' I am drawn back to Jesus' experience. Everybody was SO enthralled with him... so proud of their little boy 'Yeshua' who had grown up into such fine, articulate, faithful young man... but then, when he says something that they didn't like... when he had the nerve to say that God might show favor to someone OTHER than them... BOY, did that crowd turn on Him! '**Hallelujahs**' one minute, '**hostility**' the next. Hmmm... perhaps a portent of things to come...?

Have you ever had an encounter like this? Where things were going so well, and then the conversation turns nasty? Perhaps from something said for which someone took offense?

What's our natural reaction? To defend. Or, to 'counterattack.' To escalate the confrontation. When we're not 'feeling the *love*,' sometimes our response can be pretty '*hate-ful*.'

But how about Jesus and that angry crowd? Did he defend his statement? Did he go on the offensive, either verbally or physically? NO. Jesus was **patient**. He wasn't **arrogant** or **rude**. He did not **insist on his own way**. He was not **irritable** or **resentful**. Jesus displayed a depth of character that bore witness to Paul's words: "**BEARS all things, BELIEVES all things, HOPES all things, ENDURES all things.**" (1 Cor. 13:7) After having been 'driven out of town,' 'led to a cliff' in order to 'hurl him off,' this tense, life-threatening situation comes to a very unusual conclusion: "**He passed through the midst of them and went on his way.**" (Luke 4:30)

Perhaps this is a reminder that sometimes the best way to finally settle a volatile situation is to 'pass through the midst of it' and 'go on your way.' Regardless, as we seek to live by His example of LOVE, and how it bears a tangible witness to the qualities proposed by Paul, may we be ever mindful of how to live a life in keeping with their pattern. That in order to show others the true depth of our Christian faith, first and foremost, it will NOT be so much by what they may be *hearing* us say... but rather, by the way that they are "**feeling the love.**"

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Go forth, celebrating FAITH... HOPE... LOVE.

Go forth to be the transformed people that God calls us to be.

**Go forth to transform the world— in times of prosperity,
but most especially, in times of disbelief, hostility, fear, and rejection.**

**Go forth with the knowledge that you are always surrounded
by the presence of our steadfast, loving God, our Rock and our Redeemer.**

Go forth, knowing that the Spirit of the living God...