

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a; Matthew 22:34-40

Sermon Title: "Covenanted in Christ"

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When you think of love, what do you envision? Does the thought of love bring up the magical moments in life like a first date or a first kiss? Or maybe you find yourself picturing a little one who has graced your life with their presence as they sleep peacefully in your arms. Or you may picture a gathering of your friends enjoying life together and celebrating. Perhaps you think of the joy of Easter morning and God's great love that was so powerful that death could not hold it. I think we often, when thinking about love, go to the most picturesque moments in our lives, and in them, love is certainly found.

But love is as I'm sure you know, so much more than these idyllic moments. For love, while it may be revealed on a first date or in a first kiss, is manifested in a life built together, through all the ups and downs that life does bring. Love is in the mundane of daily life and yes, even in the disagreements found when sharing a life together. Love is not just in the holding of a sleeping infant but in the crying of cranky baby. Love is in the 3am feedings and the constant diaper changes. Love is not just found in a gathering of good friends enjoying life but in the presence of good friends who surround you through the most challenging moments. And love is not just found in the resurrection, but it is found in the crucifixion, it is found in the teaching, in every moment of Christ's life. 1 Corinthians 13, from which our first reading came, includes one of the most well-known references to love found in our Scriptures. And this passage is often read on that idyllic day of a wedding. But what is held within these words that are so poetic is a glimpse into the depth of love that I'm talking about. That for love to be patient means that there will be moments that test our patience. For love to not insist on its own way means that there will be points in life when the path taken may not be the one that we would have chosen but is the one we will go on nonetheless. And for love to bear, believe, hope, and endure ALL things means that there will be rough time as well as

smooth, joyous times and sorrowful ones, life will feel easy and life will feel hard and yet, when love is done right, love will be there regardless.

Now, love is not just found in romantic relationships or in our closest friendships, but love is in fact found all throughout our covenant life together as Christ's Church - love is found in our committed and shared life together as disciples of Jesus. As he reminds us in the Gospel of Matthew, love of God and love of neighbor are the greatest commandments for they encompass the law and the message of the prophets, and as Christ's Church, the living of love is crucially important to our covenant life together. To be a community that loves. To be a community that lives out that 1 Corinthians 13 model in all that we do, realizing that sometimes it will be easy to love and sometimes love will need to be worked at, but we will strive to love nonetheless.

As many of you know, last weekend, I was in Baltimore, Maryland for the General Synod of the United Church of Christ. And here, at this biannual gathering, over 2700 clergy and lay leaders from across the denomination gathered to worship together, conduct the business of the church together, and to simply be together as we live out our covenant as Christ's Church - a covenant deeply rooted in the love of God and the love of neighbor. Songs were sung, votes were cast. Resolutions were passed and others rejected. Some moments brought celebration and others produced heavy hearts and mixed emotions. Conversations took place and meals were shared. Old friends were seen and new friends were made. And at one point during last weekend, I found myself reflecting on what it means to be in covenant - in a covenant that is deeply rooted in love. For you see, in that gathering of 2700 people were many opinions, differing ideologies and theologies. There were people whom I have known well, others whom I recognize, and others whom I have never met before in my life. And still, I was filled with the overwhelming sense that I could go up to any one of these covenanted siblings in Christ, and invite them to dinner. That I could go up to anyone of these 2700 people and, because of the palpable sense of that covenant founded in love, ask them to share a meal. And we could share a meal together regardless of our stance on a resolution, or

on a specific issue, or on our understanding of God. And in that moment, in that realization, I came to appreciate covenant in a new way. Covenant has never been about thinking the same. Rather it is about respecting the differences, inviting God in to bridge the gaps, trusting that God's presence is in our midst even in our divergent views, and still being able to share a meal together. That love will still be witnessed in our living together, even when we do not agree.

Church, this life together will not always be easy. There will be rough times as well as smooth, joyous times and sorrowful ones, this covenant life will feel easy and will feel hard. There will be moments that test our patience and our strength. There will be moments of unanimous celebration and times of mixed emotions and heavy hearts. But in the end, as a sign of our shared covenant founded in love, blessed by God, we should always be able to gather around the table for a shared meal. And whether that meal is a simple lunch or a sacred supper, we partake together for that is what love looks like, that is what covenant looks like, that is what the church should look like. Amen.