

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a; John 20:1-18

Easter Meditation: "Love Never Ends"

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Easter is a time to celebrate love. To hear of the powerful love of God for us. To proclaim that this love is one that is stronger than death, to sing that this love could not be held by the grave. And so, as we have been approached Easter this year here in this place, through the Season of Lent, we have been spending time exploring love - taking that familiar passage from 1 Corinthians 13 which we hear again today and considering the different elements, the different aspects that are a part of love - patience, kindness, humbleness, the celebratory nature of love when it rejoices in truth, the strength of love when it endures the hardest times, the sustaining power of love when it hopes. And now today, as we celebrate Easter and the glories of an empty tomb, we remember that love never ends.

A few years back, I was speaking with a friend of mine, Amy, about love - I don't even know how the topic came up, but when you are in seminary and are thinking a lot about theology, you do sort of tend to cover a lot of random topics within every day conversation. And in the course of that particular chat, she shared something so beautiful with me about love. Now, her grandmother still wrote her handwritten letters from time-to-time, and as we all would do, she would sign them with a closing - you know, when we end a written correspondence with "sincerely" or "love". And as Amy's grandmother, signing the letters as simply "love, grandma" would make perfect sense. But her closing was more than just "love", and how she signed her letters will forever stick out to me as one of the most beautiful closings which contains such a beautiful truth. She would say, "Love you always and in all ways". "Love you always and in all ways". To me this captures so remarkably well the essence of Paul's definition of love. That love never ends and that it manifests in many, many different ways and through all different circumstances. That love does not take on only one form of expression but love is and should be felt in every way that we interact with one another,

even in the hard times, the times of disagreement, the times of struggle, there should still be love.

You know, when Mary Magdalene approached the tomb on that first resurrection morning, she came as somebody who did not yet understand all the ways that God's love was still alive and I doubt that she expected to encounter love that morning when she arrived at the tomb. Sure she had lived with the love that radiated from Jesus as she followed his earthly ministry, yet only a couple days before, she saw him, the one whom she had come to follow, to trust, to care for and about, she saw him suffer and eventually take his last breath. She knew that his lifeless body was pierced and that blood and water flowed from his side. She knew that he was taken down from the cross, and placed in a tomb and it probably felt like that was where the love was ending as well. Surely this love couldn't overcome the finality of death, could it?

Of course, we know the answer and yes it could and it did indeed! For when she saw the Risen Christ, when she understood, when she looked upon the love of God in the flesh which died and rose again, she witnessed the profound beauty of pure love that loved the world even through death. That loved the world through the pain. That loved the world into hope for hope was born anew in her heart as she saw her teacher, her savior, her Christ standing there. And while the realities of a few days prior were still true, Jesus was crucified, he was pierced, they laid him in a tomb, her focus was no longer on death or on any limitations of love, for after all she now came to witness in a profound way that love never ends, and that death no longer had power in her life. That there was and is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. Hear those words again - that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

Ever since that conversation with Amy, I see Easter as God's signature which proclaims that God loves us "always and in all ways". The resurrection does not remove challenges from our lives but it reveals to us that God's love carries us through them. Easter doesn't mean that we won't experience trials and even deep sorrows, but that God's love is with us in all that comes our way. And by removing the power of death,

Christ is calling us to remember and trust instead in the power of God's love which accompanies us even into eternity. For through this outpouring of the most powerful love ever witnessed that we celebrate in the Resurrection, God wants us to approach the changes, the challenges of life not as a people defeated but, as a people victorious. God wants us to be a people that understand just how much we are loved – how much all of God's people are loved. And that means that when we encounter trials and tribulations, we put on the power of love, and push through and burst forth into new and renewed life. That we do not allow what seems like an end to have power over our lives, to dictate how we live, to control us. That we do not get wrapped up so tight in feeling like anything is impossible that we can't see the hope which springs eternal from our God's love. For the only power over our lives is love – a love that looked at death, which seemed so final like an ultimate end, and removed its power, opening the way to everlasting life.

Beloved people of God, on this Easter Sunday, may we feel the same joy that Mary Magdalene did when she realized that God's love is for always and shared in all ways. For what we witness and what we celebrate on Easter is that the only thing that should ever have power over our lives is God's love – and it is a love that never ends. And for that gift, we rejoice and say thanks be to God! Amen.