

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a; Mark 8:31-38

Sermon Title: "Love Endures"

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Today, as we continue our journey through Lent and through the sermon series based on 1 Corinthians 13, I want to talk about the enduring nature of love. Now, in order to talk about enduring anything, we must talk about pain. For after all, endurance by its very definition means to push through an unpleasant, difficult, painful moment, time, or season of life and make it to the other side – that's endurance. And so, for a few minutes today, we are going to dwell in the uncomfortable place that is pain.

Now, to get us there, I want to share a story with you about braces – you know braces for your teeth. You see, braces are nowadays a relatively normal part of many children's development – to straighten your teeth and give you a healthy smile. Even when I was in school, a huge percentage of my classmates had braces at one point or another. And while I should have had them when I was a kid, you see my smile was a pretty gnarly smile, as a family we were not in a place where we could afford it. And so I was not able to have braces on my teeth as a child. But when I was in seminary, my family found ourselves in a place where we could finally afford it. And so, in my second year of seminary, at the age of 23, I walked into the orthodontist's office where it seemed that I was one of the oldest patients, and I was ready to get my braces.

Now, I was excited to get braces because again, my smile was one that I was always self-conscious of. And I was looking forward to having my teeth straightened and to feel good about my smile. So I was ready as I got in the chair and the doctor began to put on my new braces and I had these wonderful expectations and images in my mind of a beautiful straight smile, but what I did not expect was the pain. I walked out of that office with my brand new braces and a mouth that was in extreme pain. For the first day or two, I was told that I needed to eat a very soft diet, that anything with too much resistance would be painful, but even pudding hurt. Pudding hurt! Looking back, I can

see the humor in that statement but in the moment, there was nothing funny about it! And I remember, at the end of that first day, after having dinner that consisted of a few bites of Mashed potatoes, with my mouth in such agony, I was ready to call the doctor and say, "take them off!" I don't want to feel this pain anymore. I don't want to have braces anymore. But of course, by the next morning I had talked myself off that ledge, and I decided to keep them. And eventually, the aching subsided, that is until I had to go in and have them adjusted and there would be another day or two of aching. But eventually, after two years of those intermittent flashes of pain, the braces came off and I had the smile that I always wanted. Now, what that experience taught me was this - if I was not willing to endure the pain, I would never receive the joys of the smile that I longed for. It taught me that something wonderful can lie on the other side of pain.

No one really wants to experience pain. Yet, whether we choose it or it simply happens to us, we all will face it. Whether it be physical or emotional pain, no one is immune from it - not even Jesus. In our Gospel reading today from the book of Mark, Jesus foretells of the pain he will suffer - the physical pain of an excruciating death and the emotional ache of being rejected and forsaken. A pain that Jesus is ready to embrace that he is ready to endure, because he can also see what lies on the other side of that pain. He can see a resurrection. He can see life eternal for us. He can see love ever-flowing. But to get there, he will first face the pain, and Jesus is ready.

Yes, Jesus is ready to face this reality, however, Peter, one of the disciples, is not. Peter wants to be like me after that first day of having my braces and just take them off - get rid of the pain. He wants to do all that he can to prevent the hurt, but at what cost? What beauty, what joy, what love would be lost if Jesus did not face the pain? And I think here, Peter wants to not only prevent the pain that Jesus will suffer but the hurt that he will feel at the loss of Jesus. The pain that he will feel at the unknown because he can still not see the glories that await and the pain that he will feel of not having Jesus with him in the same way that he has been. Peter wants to stop the pain, but Jesus

reminds him that it is not his pain to stop, but will be his – will be all of ours – to endure.

In our lives, there will be moments when we must choose to live through the pain, trusting even if we cannot see it, that there is new life on the other side of it. And there will be moments when pain just happens in our lives, pain that we did not choose but which is now with us and which we must now endure. And again, whether we can see it or not, we must trust that there is new life on the other side of it.

When Jesus tells the disciples to take up their cross and follow him, he is reminding them and us that the work of being Christ's followers will have its painful moments. That even though we follow a gospel of love – one summed up by Jesus as love God and love neighbor, as Paul reminds us, love will face challenges and hardship which must be endured. Which can be endured because we are held in the love of God which never lets us go. A love that endures with us. And when it feels like the pain is overwhelming us and we don't know if we can handle it or not, may we remember Jesus, God's love in the flesh, who endured all the way to the cross, and revealed to us and the world a glory of new life, of new hope, of resurrection on the other side of that pain. And may those glories keep us going. May that love which endured the cross help us to endure all that we are facing. When the storms of life shake us and grieve us, may we persevere, strengthened by the love of our Lord – a love that will be with us through it all. And a love that will carry us to the new life, new hope, to the resurrection on the other side of the storm. So be it and may it be so. Amen.