

Good Sunday morning from a very cold hill in Rockport.....

I'm a little late with my "Sunday words" and worship service this morning..... VERY early this morning, I decided to offer a sermon not from today's RCL (Revised Common Lectionary) selections, but from one from next Sunday's selections, 1 Corinthians 13. So, a little reworking of this morning's offerings.....

We are sad this day because we have lost another beloved member of our Federated family, Muriel Pinkham. At the age of 93 it might seem strange to say she "died unexpectedly," but she did.... die unexpectedly! She was doing pretty well, just a week ago! And then.... not. Oh the reminder, once again, that we never know what week will be our last, what day we will take our final breath, no matter our age.... So, we are reminded once again to live each day as if it might be our last.... to have faith, no matter what happens.... to hope beyond hope that all will be well no matter what happens.... and to love as if our very lives depended on how we treat one another.

Blessings to all this cold Sunday morning in January..... Susan

p.s. I will download this morning's scripture reading and sermon to the Federated Church of Thomaston Facebook page and my Facebook page freerangepastor in a little while for anyone who chooses to tune in.....

p.s.s. As always, thank you to those of you who send me your e-mail responses to my writings. I don't always get a chance to write back to each one of you, but I appreciate all your responses! They keep me motivated to continue writing..... And thank you to all of you who have shared your memories of Muriel with me via e-mail over these past few days. Each one is that precious reminder of how much she loved and was loved.....

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, January 23, 2022  
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet  
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

**A Call to Worship**

Holy God, as we abide you your presence, still from cyberspace,  
help us know your saving acts.

Strengthen us to do what is good in your eyes.

Guide us as we do our best to walk humbly with you.

Shape our lives to your will, not ours.

Teach us and provoke us to acts of compassion and words of love,

in your name always, and in memory of our dear Muriel this day.  
Amen.

### **1 Corinthians 13 adapted as a prayer to be read or spoken**

If we speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, we are noisy gongs or clanging cymbals. And if we have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if we have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, we are nothing. If we give away all our possessions, and if we hand over our bodies so that we may boast, but do not have love, we gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

When we were children, we spoke like children, we thought like children, we reasoned like children; when we became adults, we put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now we know only in part; then we will know fully, even as we have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

### **A sermon based on 1 Corinthians 13 “For we know only in part....”**

Will you pray with me. Wise God, teach us what we yet may be this day. Help us live out the profound message of 1 Corinthians 13 as though it were stamped on our foreheads for all to see and written on our hearts for us to grasp in its fullest intent. May *your* Word be our guide and *our* words be acceptable to you this day. Amen.

1 Corinthians 13, is known as “the love chapter” of Paul’s words to the first Christians in the city of Corinth. This book of the Bible was written probably twenty-five or so years after Jesus’ death. This chapter of 1 Corinthians is one of my favorites in the Bible. It is one of the biblical passages that focuses most clearly on the “bottom line” of the Bible as the Word of God for me – “And now

faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor 13:13)

The first time I heard 1 Corinthians 13 was during the funeral of Princess Diana in August of 1997. I was in seminary at the time, and was watching her funeral on TV in a live broadcast. Her brother’s reading of this text was unforgettable! When I hear or read the words of 1 Corinthians 13 now, I always think of Princess Diana’s funeral. Isn’t it funny, or maybe not, that certain passages of scripture take us to another time and place in our lives.... an event that is never far from our consciousness.... a memory of one lost to death.... And so it is fitting that we reflect on this “love chapter” of 1 Corinthians as we mourn today the death of Muriel Pinkham, who, for me, was the epitome of the closing verse, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

Muriel’s faith was evident in her words, her actions, and her commitments to others. Her hope never failed her. She was joy-filled and optimistic and looking forward to every day, right up to less than a week ago. Recent health matters were clearly a challenge, but she persevered and put a “best face” on regardless. And Muriel’s abiding love.... it radiated from her, it was contagious, it was never-ending and always present.

Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is often read at weddings and funerals. I’ve offered it in those settings myself many times – for its focus on love and goodness and faith and hope. But I have to smile every time someone asks me if I can read 1 Corinthians 13 for a wedding or a funeral, because the original intention of Paul’s letter to the first followers of Jesus in Corinth, and specifically Chapter 13, was not for weddings or funerals. It was because people were not getting along and were exhibiting behavior that was not in the loving and compassionate spirit with which Jesus would have wanted them to act!

A little background here is helpful. Eugene Peterson, a well known theologian and pastor who recently died, writes of the setting and time of this letter of Paul’s, “The people of Corinth had a reputation in the ancient world as an unruly, hard-drinking, sexually promiscuous bunch of people. When Paul arrived with the Message of the ‘good news’ [of Jesus] and many of them became believers in Jesus, they brought their reputations with them right into the church. Paul spent a year and a half with them as their pastor, going over the Message of the ‘good news’ in detail, showing them how to live out this new life of salvation and holiness as a community of believers. Then he went on his way to other towns and churches.

Sometime later [after Paul had left Corinth] he received a report from one of the Corinthian families that in his absence things had more or less fallen apart. He also received a letter from Corinth asking for help. Factions had developed, morals were in disrepair, worship had degenerated into a selfish grabbing for the supernatural.... [So] Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is a classic of pastoral response: affectionate, firm, clear, and unswerving in the conviction that God among them, revealed in Jesus and present in his Holy Spirit, continued to be the central issue in their lives, regardless of how much of a mess they had made of things.

[Peterson goes on,] Paul doesn't disown them as brother and sister Christians, doesn't throw them out because of their bad behavior, and doesn't fly into a tirade over their irresponsible ways. He takes it all more or less in stride, but also takes them by the hand and goes over all the old ground again, directing them in how to work all the glorious details of God's saving love into their love for one another. [Peterson concludes,] when people become Christians, they don't at the same moment become nice. This always comes as something of a surprise. Conversion to Christ and his ways doesn't automatically furnish a person with impeccable manners and suitable morals."<sup>[1]</sup>

Knowing the background of Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> letter to those first followers of Jesus in Corinth, the words of 1 Corinthians 13 take on even more meaning than they do when they are offered for wedding celebrations or funeral remembrances. The message of the chapter is timeless. It seems to me it offers the best and fullest of the "Word of God," because it touches on all the attributes of human behavior and holy response: first, the *worst* attributes – those envious or boastful or arrogant or rude, those insisting on their own way, those irritable or resentful; those rejoicing in wrongdoing. Sound familiar to some of what we see in family life, church life, community life, political life today?

And Chapter 13 touches on the best attribute of human life – love... Love is patient; love is kind; love rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. I see those attributes, too, everyday... in the words and actions of many people in our local communities and beyond. Unfortunately our media sources, and sometimes we individually, would rather be "the first with the worst," than "the humblest with the highest" within us and around us.

Fortunately, Paul doesn't just leave the first followers of Jesus in Corinth, or us either, hanging... wondering if we're really ever going to get right with God, trying to "get it" about "the Word of God." He reminds the Corinthians, and us, too, that we don't know the whole picture yet. We're not in command of all there is or what will happen in the future. If we think we're smart and have a handle on all the knowledge there is to know, we're mistaken.

Have you ever used a two-sided mirror? That's one with one side with everyday mirroring, and the other side with magnified mirroring. The older I get the more I like the one that isn't magnified – because the higher magnification side shows up too many of my aging features! But we need both sides – we need to see both from a distance, dimly, and know that we are and will be seen close up by God, clearly, with all our blemishes and wrinkles and scars from not very nice behavior, *and* with all our tears of faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love – don't ever forget that.... because God won't.

Muriel never forgot, and was able to see herself on both sides of that mirror. She could see close up and from afar. Her faith was her rock, her hope was her touchstone, her love was all encompassing for each one of us.

The Bible *is* the Word of God for me and it certainly was the Word of God for Muriel. Many of you knew Muriel far longer than I did. But in these past two years, since the covid nightmare began in early 2020, I came to know Muriel well in our weekly in person chats, due to her not being "on line" and thus not able to receive the words I was sending out to those who are connected to me via cyberspace. I came to know Muriel was a true and living example of what love is according to the words of 1 Corinthians 13. May she be at peace now for all eternity. May each of us walk in her footsteps with the words of the "love chapter" of 1 Corinthians never far from our thoughts.

Let the people say, "Amen."

**To hold in our prayers this day.....**

**E**specially today, we hold in prayer the family and many friends of Muriel Pinkham who died in the very early morning hours yesterday, January 22....Dear Muriel, we love you..... rest in peace now and forever....

From our most recent bulletin and more....

**P**lease hold in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus....

**A**nd all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs among their members....

**A**nd all those dealing with the ravages of cancer near and far.....

**A**nd all those affected, which should be every one of us, by the cruel condition of racism which continues to take the lives of too many of our Black brothers and sisters, as we approach Martin Luther King, Jr. Day ....

**A**nd all those who have worked tirelessly for the building and rebuilding of our nation into one people, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.....

**A**nd add a prayer for Tammy Whirty, a friend of Margie's, dealing with cancer challenges, and, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier, continued prayers for Ursula recovering...and for "Cody," who doesn't live locally but needs prayers for guidance; Kristin Parker O'Neal, Jo Ann Parker's daughter, who has had brain surgery and is home now!; Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, BJ Thomson & family of Mimi's Uncle Doug, Heather Van Buskirk, and for Tiffany, Lucy's granddaughter.....

***Please feel free to contact Susan by phone (207)322-1948 or by email at [freerangepastor@gmail.com](mailto:freerangepastor@gmail.com) to have her add or drop any names from the prayer list AND to let her know if you would like for her to stop by for a visit sometime. She's always glad to have a chat with you!***

### **A Benediction**

*Go into this day with peace and love in your hearts.*

*May God bless you and keep you.*

*May God's face radiate upon you and flood you with grace and tender mercies.*

*May God smile upon you always and cover your life with peace.*

*Amen.*

### **Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)**

**for Sunday, January 30, 2022**

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-7; 1 Corinthians 13; Luke 4:21-30

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<sup>11</sup>Eugene Peterson, *The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Language*, Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2004, p. 1324.