

Friends and Fellow Travelers,

Since I last wrote, I've done a bit of traveling myself. I made the 7 hour drive to Arizona to attend a residency that is an element of a two-year internship in spiritual direction.

The 4 days included some amazing teaching on contemplative Christianity. We learned more about the likes of Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Jonathan Edwards, and Ignatious. Some of the time allowed me to get to know the other members of my cohort, an eclectic group of friends of Jesus who quickly felt like old friends to me. It's good to be reminded of the cloud of witnesses that have gone before and walk beside as we follow after Jesus and are transformed into his likeness.

While there was plenty of rich "content", the balance of the time was given to silence and solitude. Time to attend to the quiet yet comprehensive love of the Lord. I want to say as plainly as possible that the Holy Spirit met me in that quiet place. His work and ways are subtle yet transformative, painfully exact and perfectly healing. The only right response is praise and worship and wonder. Two nights ago, I laid down singing the victory of his love in my heart.

I hope in the years ahead, we as a church, will have time to explore these spiritual disciplines, taking time to share in participating in the life of the Trinity, to found ourselves and find ourselves in the biblical story, and to contemplatively practice our faith: nurturing, attending, reflecting, and responding to the abiding presence of the Lord. For I am convinced that nothing is more needed or as accessible than His presence, His love.

I wish I could end the letter here, but there are harder truths to tell as we live between the *Kingdom come near* and wait upon the *Kingdom to come in full*.

I drove back across the desert and found the devil waiting...and spoiling for a fight.

I won't waste lines on circumstantial detail, but I will say this: most of my life I have wrestled with self-hatred, and in the two days I have been home, Satan (the accuser) has taken every opportunity to remind me of the reasons why I just might be unlovable. Last night I went to bed broken in spirit, mourning, and feeling incredibly meek.

But the Lord graced me with good sleep, deep rest. I woke up in a warm house, next to my god-loving, god-loved wife. My sweet kids began waking one by one, and just for an extra measure, Lincoln, the golden puppy was there, literally, trembling with love.

Here's what I know. The God of the Bible, Who walks as the son of man in Jesus, who indwells our being as the Holy Spirit is present; he gives us his peace; he fills us with power.

I know we have an enemy, and the battle we face within and without is brutal and bloody.

But here is the last word, and exactly where we are headed in 1 Corinthians 13, *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.* And He is love.

We will walk through landscapes of spiritual solace as well as fields of fierce trial. Sometimes, they're only a day apart. But when we walk with Him, we know that love is the way, the provision, and the destination.

Let's keep walking,

Matthew

## 1 Corinthians 13 Outline

### *The Way of Love*

*1If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

- Consider the things that may distract us from love: prophetic powers, understanding, knowledge, mountain-moving (miraculous) faith, martyrdom.
- Which of these appeals to your temperament or desires?
- How can this gift and your desire for it be kept within the safeguards of love?

*4Love is patient and kind;*

- Let's contemplate what *love is*...patient and kind.
- How does that challenge, encourage, or correct your heart?

*love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.*

- Let us consider what *love does not do*.
- Again, what response does this list form in your heart?

*7Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

- Now we see what love does.
- As you consider that list, in what ways have you experienced this type of love?
- In what circumstance and ways is God inviting you to extend this type of love to others?

*8Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

- Name the promises you see in this passage.
- Describe any nudges you receive in these words.
- Is there anyway you experience humility?
- What comfort can you take with you to rest in, to find courage in?

*13So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

- In what specific ways, by what particular practices, can we keep the model of God's love before us and within us, receiving it and giving it away?