

"TESSERING"

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

July 8, 2018

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all the mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others, isn't always "me, first," doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel, takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, puts up with anything, trusts God always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end. Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit.

Picture an ant moving from point to point along a stretched-out thread laid out on your back porch. The time it takes this determined little creature to move between start to finish is a linear calculation—it takes so many seconds, minutes, or hours in a straight line. But now, double the thread partially over onto itself and put the ant again at the start line. It will be able to travel the length of the string in a much

shorter time. That is how Madeleine L'Engle describes the fantasy science of "tessering" in her classic story, *A Wrinkle in Time*. When one tesses, one jumps dimensions of time and space, or if you will, slips through a wrinkle in the three-dimensional world we know into a fourth dimension we have not known.

In that outer dimension, the normal rules of our piddly-little science are suspended. Why Meg Murry, her brother Charles Wallace, and their friend Calvin need to go tessering about the universe is the subject of the plot of the film, so I will not spoil it here.

The recent film made from the original story from 1962 is the motion picture we are showing at church tonight. What at first seems like a children's tale quickly morphs into an experience of great wisdom, metaphor, and moral teaching. It reminds me of the effect *The Wizard of Oz* had on the adults who thought they were showing their little ones 'just a children's story.' I beg to differ.

A Wrinkle in Time is clever, magical in sound and color, and well-acted by known artisans alongside first-timer child actors. A delight for the eyes and ears, this tale tells us a lot about the simplest—and yet most complex of the human emotions; it shows us the power and powerlessness—of love.

I find it curious that Paul finds time in the turmoil of the first century Christian struggles and persecution to write about love. It is

not a loving time; rather, it is a time of relentless persecution of Christians. It is a time in which fledgling faith communities are struggling to stay together. And Paul is not known as a particularly loving man. By all accounts we have, he was serious, severe, critical, and ill-tempered. So why is he writing about love?

Paul is not writing a love letter in 1 Corinthians as one might write a lover or a love-interest. In the Greek language, the word "love" has many word constructions, depending on the intended meaning.

Paul is not writing in this passage about *eros* love, "heart love." He is writing about *agape* love, that love that might be defined in English as Martin Copenhaver suggests: "Agape is unconditional love, the love that does not ask for anything in return, self-giving love, sacrificial love. It is the kind of love associated with Jesus."

Although you may have heard today's scripture passage in its more familiar NRSV version at many a wedding, this use is a sweetly sentimental, but misplaced meaning of Paul's intent. If any of you had this read at your wedding, I apologize—of course it means in English what we adapt it to mean, and it surely can be construed in English to represent the love between committed marital partners.

But if we are true to the original language and intent for which it was written, we are led to the insight that Paul was using the concept of *agape* love in his efforts to hold together his start-up congregation at Corinth that was threatened from within and without by the ongoing

persecutions, the absence of goodwill between church members, by the wavering of commitment to his interpretation of Christian ideals.

With his vision of *agape* love, Paul enters another dimension, perhaps the Fourth Dimension of understanding, a pure love modeled by Jesus for humanity. Sadly, humanity has never really been able to return Jesus' *agape* love either for him or for the rest of the world.

There are three other-worldly mentors for the children in *A Wrinkle in Time*. You get the sense that they understand and practice the fine art of *agape* love. Of course they do! They are not of this world!

Mrs. Whatsit exclaims to the children that "wild nights are my glory!" It is her first mission, and she is beyond excited to demonstrate her enthusiasm and her charm to the pint-sized time travelers.

Mrs. Who has no original thoughts of her own. She speaks in the words of the world's great sages—names like Rumi, Churchill, and Buddha. She quotes wise sayings such as, "Life without love is like a tree without blossom or fruit," and "The wound is the place where the light enters you."

Mrs. Which (W-h-i-c-h) asks Meg, who has not yet learned to love herself, "Do you realize how many events in the universe had to happen to lead to the making of you?" She is out to find Warriors to fight the

darkness and bring back light to the world. Kind of like Jesus. Kind of like Paul.

"Love" is a simple word in English, a simple word fraught with many misunderstandings. What does it mean to "love" your church and how does this differ from loving your neighborhood? What does it mean to "love" your family and how does this differ from loving your lover? What does it mean to "love" your country and how does this differ from loving your fellow countrymen and women? What does it mean to "love" God and how does this differ from how God loves you?

Little word. Big questions. No easy answers. Paul tells his fledgling church to keep fighting, fighting for the love, fighting to turn away the darkness, striving to be to one another was and is Jesus is for them—unconditional. Giving. Selfless. Forgiving. Forever.

Do we have to travel through the wrinkle in time to find the meaning of *agape* love? I hope not. A. I need to find it right within these four walls, right in my own neck of the woods, right here right now, and B. I hope not, because I don't understand the science of all these dimensions and I'm pretty sure the Misses are not sending me their calling card.

Agape love, selfless love, can be practiced here and now. We need not fly into the Fourth Dimension either to find it or practice it. Though we live in just a wrinkle of time, though we are but ants

walking to and fro along our tiny threads of life, we have purpose. We have soul. We have God living and working through us. We know love.

May it be so.