

Feb 10, '19, I Corinthians 13.1-13, Anthon UMC, "There Is Love"
By Pastor Sheryl K Ashley

Thank you to Beau Wolfe for being a troubadour for God this morning, singing God's promise that whenever two or more of you are gathered in His name there is love. And here we are 2 or more gathered together in His name and there is love. This is a day so close to Valentine's Day and we pause to think of Love that comes in all shapes and sizes, colors and causes. We love a lot of things. We love candy that makes us fat and rots our teeth. We love roses. (Never anything wrong is loving a rose except a thorn or two) Last week we loved Superbowl competitions where men bruised and tackled one another getting a football over an end zone for incredible amounts of money. Last week some of us loved listening to State of Union speech where some stood and some did not for all the right or all the wrong reasons. Remember. love is a multitude of things.

Most of us really love weddings where people pledge their love to one another, for so long as they both shall live...at least at the time we say the vows...but things happen for we are boatful and arrogant or rude insisting on our own way, not rejoicing in the truth,... because we are human and human love can fail because we don't know what is going to happen in our lives to test it, or if the person we pledge all this love to is going to one day unpledge theirs to us for we humans do not endure well all things. But God

never breaks his union with us, even when we break ours with him. There is love.

In preparing my message I was thinking that hearing a few local love stories from within our midst today would be appropriate so I decided that if I would listen really closely this week and if I heard any love stories from the tongues of mortals or of angels, I would share them with you. Are you ready?

You can hear love stories everywhere. You will if you are listening, for they are happening all around and among us. You may think of some of your own as I share mine. By the way, I want you to know I asked permission of all whose names are mentioned. For instance, I visited our own Lucille Buettner recently. She's going to be 100 years old in May. You should know all about love by the time you reach 100, shouldn't you? Every time I visit her, she shares the love stories of her life with me and I am inspired by her thankfulness to God for them. Each time she tells me with a smile that God has been so good to her. She tells me that God gave her the best husband ever in Herold and how his chair still sits empty and kept in good condition next to the recliner that was hers to sit next to his as they shared their life together. However, she no longer sits in hers as it is different since he left his, so she sits in another chair less sacred to her

memories. She said she talks to Harold every night as was their habit when he was alive. If God has blessed you with children to love, you will also know that this is love given from God. Lucille tells me of her love for their two daughters, Deanna and Karen and their spouses. Deanna who cleans her house and Karen who brings her food and how they both call her...often when I am there, so I know it's true. She tells me of her and Harold's love each other, their love for this church and their work in it and for the town in which we are located. Lucille tells of her love for her grandchildren and their families and for her great grandchildren and her great great grandchildren. The love goes on. I'm sure the family had hard times, of sickness and loss, but always God saw them through. When Harold was ill and in the nursing home, Lucille was there every day with him. When he died years ago, she told me she remembers it was the week after I gave him communion, so you know it was a long time ago when I served here as associate pastor. That was the greatest sadness of Lucille's life, but having faith in God's love meant she is never really alone, and she waits patiently for the day she and the love of her life, Harold, will be reunited. Love is patient, love is kind and love endures all things. Now that is a love story lived out through years of faithful commitment. God has been good to Lucille. He has enabled her to live fairly independently in her own

home and she often walks around in it forgetting to use her walker. God has been good to her.

Another love story I experienced this week was told at a funeral I attended, in a Catholic Church and I heard the priest tell over and over how Doris O'Connell always showed her love for God and family by bringing the altar of God into her home. He said she kept her children faithful at attending the church so they would have a piece of the church always in their home. She brought them to the altar with the Holy Eucharist so they would have a piece of the table of God in their home. The priest used the humorous illustration of the many scrubbers Doris would crochet out of scratchy yarn. He called them a symbol of how she kept her children scrubbed clean of sin through bringing the church into her home and how she kept herself clean of sin scrubbing herself clean of sin also, for sin is a part of all our lives. She and husband Joe, were married for 61 years and raised 5 children in a small home with one bath, but as Joe said, "It never seemed too crowded." There is love in that story I heard this week and it stemmed from making the church at home in their home.

Now all love stories are not made of long marriages and even the long ones struggle, some of them big time. But some love stories are of great and small sacrifices made in our lives caring for others. Some for our

spouse, our neighbor, our children and grandchildren, some for the young and some for the old, some for the sick and handicapped. There is love.

Another love story is just one of many I hear coming from this church this week is of Shirley Nelson who drove our dear elderly couple, Robert and Eleanore Lewis, faithfully married 68 years, to the city for a doctor's appointment on a windy, cold and gloomy day this week. Eleanore tells me of how many of you call and check on her. I see gracious acts toward the elderly in our church family done silently and modestly by many and I find myself saying of this body of Christ, "There is love."

When I see our elderly people, maybe a bit unsteady on their feet, so faithfully, maybe I should say determinedly...you know who they are... I see you here right now, coming to church on Sunday morning or whenever you are needed, whenever you can, I am touched that there is love that never ends and your lives are a witness to your unending faith and obedience to God. There is love!

One more love story came to my ears as I visited Bettina Perkins this week who was busy working on a class to show others how to paint different levels in a picture. She is alone and you may remember two of her sons died, but it is her love story that son Blake, who has developed a

close relationship with God takes her out to breakfast every Friday and then they get groceries. There is love.

In a church family we go the 2nd mile to help one another and to take up the slack when one of us is unable for some reason or another. I certainly have experienced that here, for when I have been weak, there are those among us who have been strong in my place and I am grateful. We are a fragile people. The strongest of us can fall when least expected and the weakest of us give of our time and strength to fill in the empty spaces. There is love.

In a church family, like all human families, we have disagreements and frustrations and it takes a real and godly love to make a conscious decision to find neutral ground, to work out problems, to forgive one another and not hold grudges that quickly surface the next time a touchy subject comes up. In that, there is love.

These love stories are very close to home but the next one I bring before you is not only close to home but spreads out to the international level of testing our love as a church denomination.

As I shared with you last Sunday, on Feb. 23 through Feb 26, in St. Louis, Missouri, the UMC in a special General Conference dealing with the subject of human sexuality will be tested in the subject of love, whether we

will vote to side with inclusive love that accepts and loves what we may not, or whether we will see love as obedience to how we interpret God's word and others do not. Each individual church and pastor will have to make that choice. What that all boils down to is how we see Jesus' kind of love operating in our own lives and in our own particular church and in the United Methodist Church in General. Right now, we are seeking to find the Holy Ground of how we understand God's will to be about human sexuality as have the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, the United Church of Christ, and the Episcopalians among others. Interpreting the Holy Spirit is a dangerous place to be wrong. If the choices come down to accept what is called the One Church Plan as I expect they will, we will avoid demanding the whole community of UMs becomes liberal or the whole community becomes conservative. If it comes down as I think it will and I could be wrong, each church and each pastor will be given the choice as an individual church or pastor to allow or not allow those with sexual orientation unlike the accepted norm the same rights as those who believe that God's word forbids such actions. If we go this compromising direction, we will have a hard time calling ourselves "United" Methodists anymore. I don't know about you but I'm glad I'm not a delegate to the special decision-making session of General Conference. I'm not sure there is an

acceptable compromise for all to be had, as compromise can weaken the fiber of any church that struggles to stay united. Is our love strong enough to hold us together?

Unless God's love reigns over all hearts and minds, there will be a terrible split in our beloved church. I believe the heart of God will be as broken as many of ours, for Paul describes the church as the bride of Christ and he describes Jesus as the bridegroom. Scriptures give us marriage as an example of Christ and his church. Can we divorce the church and still be the Bride of Christ? We proclaim we are part of one body when we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We see those who believe as you do or I do as correct. However, those who do not see as maybe you or I see, need to be seen through the lenses of God's love, for we are brothers and sister to the end and there is always the chance that at the end, God will say, "Why didn't you love each other as I have loved you?"

Our scripture today says, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now, we see in a mirror dimly, then we will see face to face." We can only see in part for we are each but a small part of the body of Christ. We can't see the whole picture. It's like that story I told you last week of the coach directing the

plays of his athletes during the game because he could see the whole picture and they could not. God sees where each move will take us. We do not, but it is our part to faithfully love through it all, disagreeing with our spiritual family sometimes about important things, but always agreeing that we are family and trusting God with the outcome. I was reminded this week about a saying my senior pastor said to me years ago when we served at Grace UMC in Sioux City when at times I would get frustrated with how some people never seemed to give their best to God's service. He would say humbly, "I always think most people are just doing the best they can." And I would say, "Do you really think so?" And he would say, "I do, don't you?" I was always convicted by his words of grace. In such love is true grace, the grace that caused Jesus to take the cross for all those such as you and me who may or may not be doing our best, so he covers us with His own righteousness and gives us another chance. Such love in Jesus Christ never ends. Therein is love.