

You know, when I was watching the interviews with the candidates for Bishop a couple of weeks ago, there was a question asked that most candidates hate—but that always makes me smile.

“What are you reading?”

It’s a trick question, actually. All candidates know that. So we usually come prepared with the title of some deep theological work, or some current, popular theological work—preferably by a good, but non-controversial author.

But what I watch for is a candidate who dares to say that they are reading fiction. Why? Because stories have the power to show us faith and hope and love with a power that theology alone can’t.

It’s why – when we hear the scriptures—we are much more likely to prefer the stories of the boy, Jeremiah—or the stories of Jesus—over the theology of Paul, or the history of Kings or Chronicles.

This particular passage by Paul this morning is easier to listen to than most of his writings. Love is Kind, love is bears all things, endures all things—we KNOW this passage.

And the part of about how we are like clanging symbols – or bashing relentless noise—if we don’t have love—well, that almost brings up a picture in our minds, makes us feel something. It’s kind of like poetry. It makes us think, makes us feel. That all good.

“These three things are important: faith, hope and love—but the greatest of these is love.”

Again—we’ve heard this so many times it’s comforting.

- First there’s faith: I’ve preached on Faith here—remember? I said faith was an *action figure*. The Hebrews word for faith had three components: the capacity to trust, the courage to act, and the willingness to commit to that action. It involves not just *feeling something*—but it mandates being willing to ACT on that feeling—knowing God will meet you in that action.
- Hope – the ability to see a good ending-- even when all looks bleak
- Love: Not just a feeling, but a willingness to put ourselves in the place of another, to have the courage to risk for another.

So Faith, hope and love are the most important things, but the greatest of these is love.

That’s very nice. Don’t you feel all warm inside? But how does this become visceral knowledge—how does this become *real*, not just in the sense that we “believe” in something –but that we’ve lived it?

How do we become a part of the action?

Our choices each day are perhaps not so dramatic—or are they?

How does love intrude into our world today? (Do you think the word intrude is too strong?)

- Are we willing to listen to someone who’s life may be very different from ours? Listen without judgement to a person who feels invisible, unlovable, unwanted by society? Even if it makes us uncomfortable?

It can sometimes save a life—to be heard.

- Would WE be willing to put ourselves between a child and a gun?

Teachers are doing it without question.

- Would we be willing to open up the doors of this church to people who might freeze to death in the bitter cold?

And if we wouldn't, why wouldn't we?

*If we speak in the language of humans- and even angels, but do not have love, we are nothing by noise. And if we have prophetic powers, and understand everything, and even have enough faith to move Mount Battie, but don't have love, we are nothing. If we give away everything we own, and boast that we would give up more—even our lives-- for God---but do not have love for everyone, we gain nothing.*

Because—love is not just the third part of a trinity of nice things—it is everything. Amen.