



LESSONS IN LIVING

Loving Through Difficult Times

“Part 2: Love is Patient”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
August 16, 2026

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, and it is not snobbish; it is never rude or self-seeking; it is not prone to anger, nor does it brood over injuries. Love doesn't rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices in the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

Sermon

Well, thank you all for being here. I have the imposter syndrome where I keep expecting to come and find an empty church. (*Laughter*) I think I'm particularly paranoid because when I'm gone for writing leave and I come back, there's almost always people who have been visiting the church. They *love* the congregation, but then I preach. (*Laughter*) And I get it. I understand it. I'm not that crazy about controversial issues myself. I'm conflict avoidant. But I don't think the world needs another church that doesn't stand up for the human family, particularly the unpopular members of the human family.

When we built this church, it looked like it was going to be a 1,000-member church, and I just felt with every cell in my body that that's not what the world needs. At the time, I had wonderful minister allies who told me if I brought up the subject of homosexuality, I was tearing the church apart. If I brought up the word abortion. . . In seminary, you learn how to give very vague sermons so that everybody kind of knows what you're talking about, but nobody knows exactly what you're saying. (*Laughter*)

So, it seemed really important to me to say the words, the words that trigger the kind of hysterical reaction. Because if we can't deal with that *here* in a community of *love*, how are we supposed to deal with it in the world? If love can't stand up to truth, then what good is it?

My whole childhood, I convinced myself that had I lived in 1934 Germany, I wouldn't have been silent. And if I'd lived in the 1860 Confederacy, that I wouldn't have been silent about

enslavement. And it kind of felt like a sucker punch when the MAGA movement took over the country. Because all of a sudden, I get the chance to risk for other people. You get the chance to risk for other people. And the question is, did we ever really mean it?

So, what I try to do is think about what a prophet would say to us in our day. What would Isaiah say? What would Jeremiah say? Because the secret of prophecy is not the messenger, it's the message. I became convinced and thank you so much if you've been coming here for 30 or 40 years for not leaving, that humanity has outgrown capitalism. We can take some good things from it, but the idea of measuring wealth by possession has had its day. And there's only suffering when we continue to allow poverty, to neglect healthcare because it's not profitable. It will *always* be more profitable to deny insurance than to provide it. It will always be more profitable to *pollute* the planet than to clean the planet. So, it doesn't take a whole lot of imagination to realize that era has passed. And that causes a *panic*. I understand that. The nation-state is obsolete. We *cannot* survive as a species if we *kill* each other because we're on other sides of a line.

The idea that we have a leader who we know lies on a regular basis and we're killing people on the word of his administration *saddens* me incredibly. No great nation does that. We *have* to go beyond the choices that we were given. Sectarian religion has come to an end. If we can't find the truth in all paths of love, then religion is a problem we need to outgrow. Sexism, racism, you know the list.

The MAGA movement represents a regression on every issue I care about. I never thought I'd be going to Washington, D.C. to protect voter rights for people of color in my lifetime. I never thought that *half* of America, the female half, would be considered breeding stock by the government of the United States.

There have been times in history where the institutions imploded like they've done. This is not that rare of a time. There are times when people have to let go of things that are no longer working and become ambassadors for a new age. That's where we are. And our choices are despair, trying to hold on to that which is dying, or a brave new hope, of a gift for the future that we may never live long enough to see.

Saint Paul wrote a book called 1 Corinthians, and the passage that almost everybody knows is the love passage. Y'all may hear it at a wedding coming up. It's one of the most powerful passages in literature but we don't get the depth of it because we don't know what the words mean. So, in this series, we're going to go through almost word by word, and we're going to look at the Greek words and see what they mean in their richness.

To say love is patient, *yeah, okay*, but that's not going to save the world. Passivity is not going to save the world. The word we're going to look at today is the first one, is “love is patient”

μακροθυμία Makrotumia

You don't have to look at the top word, but that second word is makrothumia, and it's a word that developed. There's some usage of it in the Stoic vocabulary, but primarily it was a product of the Christian church and of the Jewish synagogues. The first word, "macro," means "large." You probably recognize that. "Thumia" means "emotions." That's almost all we know about it, but we're going to look at that. We're going to see how it's used in other translations.

I'm going to ask the question, "*how can we be loving people in this time of cruelty and deception?*" Can we understand the dynamics of love at a more profound level that will allow us to live meaningful lives with inner peace and with joy regardless of what happens around us? Paul is going to give a list of the virtues. In the early church, there was a belief that love is like the perfume that takes place when the virtues are in balance, when the emotions are in balance.

So, when we've been told to love other people— in this church, we don't use the word "God" as much as we use the word "love," but let's face it, love is as vague and mysterious as God. We don't always know what it means. And we certainly don't know how in a time like this to love the people who are destroying the planet and still stop them. We don't have the option of letting them torture our human family while they learn. But can we see their humanity?

Some of you know that a couple of years ago, I was on the Tucker Carlson Show. And I was a little nervous about it. He's kind of changing his stripes now, but at the time it was like all these sucker punches. Like I was sitting in the green room, and they were taking shots at me on the live feed. And I was working on immigration, and a lot of the lawyers were really scared that I was going to do damage. Which is always a possibility. (*Laughter*)

But what I knew was if I *would not* let him dehumanize immigrants and I *would not* dehumanize him, that those were both sides of the same equation. I *knew* that if I lost his humanity, he would tear me apart. So, I could love him as a human being but also *oppose* what he's doing to other people. This is what Paul is trying to teach us. We think of love as just simply an emotion, but what he's saying is the foundation of love are these virtues. He's going to go through a list, and you can come up with your own list of what the virtues that hold your life together.

But the point is you don't have to start with manufacturing positive feelings towards people who are abusing you or people you care about. You work on the *foundation*, you work on the pillars of virtue, and then the love comes naturally. Not first. But you remember that we're *all* confused, we're *all* lost, and any of us can become cruel at a given time. What the world needs is people whose foundation cannot be shaken in times like this, and that's the gift Paul is trying to give us. Love is makrothumia.

When I look at that word, it basically means large emotions, and I see that as having a larger context for our emotions than we sometimes fall into. We can get tunnel vision, we can get obsessed, but if we balance all of the emotions then love is a natural byproduct.

So, almost the only place we can start is with our negative emotions— the *anger*, *bitterness*, the *despair*. And the job is to deepen those and broaden them, and they become something beautiful, something virtuous, because your anger is coming from a sense of righteous indignation. Your despair is— it's a new age and you don't yet know your role in that.

If you've ever fallen in love, and hopefully you have, in one sense, it's falling in love with one person, but in another sense, it changes everything. When you're deeply in love, the insects are beautiful and charming. The birds have a beautiful song. And that's going to last about 9 minutes. *(Laughter)* We've come in and out of that kind of blissful beatitude. It's what Jesus called it. But we don't need it to be here all the time. We can live in the memory of that perfume. It can bless everything we do.

The first thing I think makrothumia means is to remember that we're part of something larger than just ourselves. We're humankind. We're the web of life. We're the cosmos. In Hinduism, that's called Mahatma. You sometimes hear Gandhi called "Mahatma." You have your "little self" that you were maybe taught and the "great self" that emerges at certain times. When you fall in love with everything and everyone at the same time, that's the Mahatma in you. That's your great soul. So, it's not just a duty, it's heaven. It's a heaven that you carry with you wherever you go.

Your foundation for living is very unstable if you live in your fate and not in your character. That's understandable. But when you live in other people's opinions, think how easily that's shaken. When you think your value comes from what you possess, think how easily that's stolen from you. If you realize your greatest treasures are the virtues that lead you to love, you can carry that with you almost no matter what life does. That doesn't make you necessarily comfortable or happy, but you can live in joy and peace under most circumstances. So, the first thing I think Paul is telling us is when we can't love, instead of spanking ourselves for that, work on the foundation. Tune your instrument.

One of the hardest things when people start playing the guitar is you gotta be in tune, you know, and everybody but you knows that, but no matter how hard you try, if the guitar's not in tune, it's not going to sound like you want it to. In the same way, to realize how important it is for you to work on your heart. When you feel bitterness, to realize that's a thorn, that's a wound, and you don't have to feel bad for feeling that way, but can you deepen it and can you broaden it? So that's the first idea, that you live in a larger context. It's your character, not your fate.

Then the second question is to ask the question, "*what does this reaction mean to the rest of the world?*" When there's somebody I can't love, to think about what that means to the people that I do love.

C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *Screwtape Letters*, and it's supposed to be kind of a comedy, kind of a satire, and it's an older demon teaching a young demon how to trick Christians. And one of the ways that the older demon taught the younger demon is to focus on things that irritate you about other people—the gestures, the tones of voice. And the older demon says he'll never know that he has the same irritating traits because he doesn't see himself.

Makrothumia means to deepen and broaden. It's not your fault that you start with raw emotions. That's the *only* honest place you can start. But the art of living is the art of processing those raw emotions. And when there are people you can't love, do not let that rob you of the love you have for nature, for other people. And then you ask yourself the question, "*is it better for the people I love for me to hate this person here? Does that bring more light into the world? More joy, more*

goodness? Will the person that I love feel better about me seeking revenge or healing the world?" Because the people we love are going to live in the world with the people that we don't love. We don't have to *like*, we don't have to *tolerate*, we can struggle against, we can challenge, but once we dehumanize other people, we've fallen into the same trap that's terrifying them.

When a President talks to the American people and says of a group of people that they're eating their pets, that is a *monstrous* lie. And every person in the room should have left when he said that lie. When he bullies reporters, every person in the room should leave. When people say Somalians are taking over and swindling people with no proof, no evidence; when people say in Texas people are saying that Muslims are coming together to impose Sharia law. Does love confront that or not? Does love build on lies because that's a more polite thing to do? Or does it love the person and challenge the lies?

Your foundation for living is going to be so much stronger if you live in the larger world, as much of the whole as you can, and realize that you don't have to start off loving *everybody*, but *don't forget* the people you do love as you're resisting the people that you are having problems.

The last thing that I get from this makrothumia— and some of the translations are interesting, they're more about time. One of the common translations is “long-suffering,” which I don't like very much. But it's not patience in the sense of passive. Another way of saying it is “sanctified delay.” It's “forbearance.” It's “purposeful waiting.” This is the way Fulton Sheen said it,

patience is not an absence of action. Rather, it is timing. It waits on the right time to act for the right principles and in the right way.

So, in a sense, it's waiting for the teachable moment. It's active. It's like Gandhi's truth struggle. It never gives up, but it doesn't waste itself when it's not the teachable moment. So, by “patient,” they don't mean “passive.”

Howard Zinn wrote the book *A People's History of the United States*. He said,

If patriotism were defined not as blind obedience to government nor submissive worship to flags and anthems, but rather as love of one's country, one's other citizens all over the world, as loyalty to the principles of justice and democracy, then patriotism would require us to disobey our government when it violated these principles.

Love would demand us to stand up to the church that stigmatizes people in love.

For all the damage that's happening because of MAGA, the Democrats are no innocent group either. In fact, none of us are. Because in grade school, we were taught lies that make us think we're better than other people because we're Americans, or because we're male, or because we're white, or because we're Christian. Those lies do a damage that you can't even calculate.

So, to see yourself as living in the *human* story and realizing there'll always be setbacks, and there will always be people whose generation was born in between the ages. And yet those generations are some of the most important people because they are ones that keep the lantern of hope burning when there doesn't seem to be a lot of light around.

Paul is telling us that even when we look around us and we don't see the beloved community, to work on our foundation, to work on the virtues, and that love will naturally emerge as a beautiful

perfume. I don't blame anybody for feeling helpless and hopeless right now, but humankind has been in these kinds of moments from the very beginning. People born between the ages are some of the most important people that exist. Paul is inviting you and me to become ambassadors for a new age, for a new humanity.

Instead of trying to manufacture love as a feeling, he's saying this is the recipe. Work on the recipe. Tune your instrument. Think about what your life means to the whole world. And then finally, think about the gift that you can give to generations that you'll never live to see. And know that the only thing that can rob you of this joy, of this bliss, of this heaven it's if you ever surrender to hate. Paul is saying love is our goal, and the virtues guide us there.

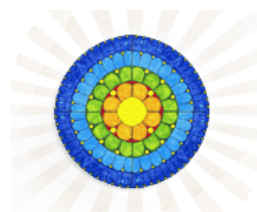
Well, this is my understanding of the text. We'll take a moment for you to think about how you would have preached it.

Benediction

We are called to be ambassadors of a new day, to embody the virtues that lead to beloved community. So ground yourself in your character, tune yourself to the life all around and within you, and be ready to act from your principles at the right time.

Beloved friends, may we bear the hope that love endures, and that one day that love will blossom into a new world. Go in peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

14311 Wells Port Dr.
Austin, TX 78728
512-251-0698
admin@staopen.org