



LESSONS IN LIVING

Loving Through Difficult Times

“Part 5: Love is Not Proud”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
September 6, 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

Good morning. I'm gonna use this kind of microphone, so y'all don't have to hear me cough. I think I can do a better job of doing the dodge there. Thank you so much for making time today.

We're doing a series on the love passage. We're looking at it in a different way. We're looking at the words that Paul uses for the virtues, and some of them are very ancient, they're very rich, they come from different cultures.

We're looking at three today because they're not as— like, they're not the classic kind of terms. They're words that just kind of, in some ways, were made up. But it's still important insights about love.

When Paul talks about love, I don't think he's talking about a feeling. He's talking about the wholeness of our humanity blossoming. And it includes the great virtues for Paul because the virtues aren't just rules that make things right. They're what keeps us fully alive.

Wisdom, temperance, justice, courage. These are the gifts that we need to get through what we face as human beings. And sometimes we don't know why we can't love. And it's that we need to explore our fear a bit, or we need to explore our desires a bit.

We're wanting things that lead us away from our own center. And that's the way I think to look at this. We remember that the classic writers had great wisdom to share with us, but they were also patriarchal, usually. They were usually imperial. They also violated human rights very often. So we have to bring new virtues to bear that Paul may not have been quite as strong at.

Today, we're talking about pride. And it's not in the sense of self-esteem. It's kind of awkward to do this sermon right after Pride Month. Paul, again, is not talking about self-esteem. Pride was something that many of the ancient sages frowned upon precisely because it wasn't self-love.

That when you think of narcissism, in the myth of Narcissus, it's somebody who falls in love with their reflection. They're not loving themselves. They're not caring for themselves. They're trying to be a reflection. They're trying to be something that people respect.

And when we do that, we can lose touch with who we really are. So again, we're doing these things not to feel bad about ourselves, but to realize where to put our weight in life. That there's certain virtues we need to hold ourselves together.

That if we let fear get out of control the way MAGA has done, it tears the world apart. The cowardice of the MAGA movement, being afraid of everything and everyone, literally tears the nation apart from the inside.

In the same way, if we don't control our desires, and we start wanting things that are not healthy for the rest of our lives, then that, that will tear us apart. If we want fairness for ourselves, but we don't want to give it to other people, that tears a human being apart. It tears a nation apart.

So what we're thinking about in this series are things that apply even though we can't get in control of the nation right now. We've got a spasm that we're in. We have lessons we need to learn.

The problems that we've had since the founding of the nation... We've never really dealt with some of these. And this is going to be a very expensive way to learn the lesson, but that's a goal we can have: to personally embody the true humanity that's been lost by so many in this nation.

Perpereuetai (περπερεύεται) **Boastful, proud, show off**

The first thing we're going to look at is, again, it's a rare word. It wasn't used that much. It's translated pride, but a better translation is being a braggart, wearing a mask. Wanting people to see us a certain way. Caring more about what other people think of us than who we really are.

If you do justice work, people are going to come up with stories about you, attacking your reputation. And you have to realize that's the price tag for standing by your character. If you stand up for unpopular people, people are going to tell stories about you.

And that's okay if you realize that's like weather. You can let that come and go as long as you live in your character and not in your fate. What happens to you, that's... We want that to be good, but we're not in control of that. And sometimes virtue gets us in more trouble at first than

we would have if we took the easy route. (coughs, shifts microphone to unfold his notes) The only problem with the microphone is I can't get to my quotes.

One poet said:

Bragging is often merely a ladder we build for ourselves out of words when we're afraid we are not tall enough in the eyes of the world. It is an unwitting confession to low self-esteem.

Have you ever known anybody that bragged a lot? And the more they bragged, the less you thought of them? That's kind of a universal thing. So being who you really are is going to impress people a lot more than trying to impress people. The president is building an Arch of Triumph.

When was the last time we won a war? World War II. It's like, what a pathetic thing to build an Arch of Triumph instead of being a strong nation. That's a nation in decline. But it did get us Lake America, so we don't want to... That was a joke. [laughter] That was a joke.

I saw that one of the leaders in Canada has named us, renamed us South Canada. [laughter] That's what you do. That's what happens when you brag. Like, you set yourself up for absolute humiliation. There's no way this is going to end good.

James Baldwin said:

Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without, and we know we cannot live within. I use the word love here not merely in the personal sense, but as a state of being or a state of grace. Not in the infantile American sense of being made happy, but in the rough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.

So Paul is giving us a warning that love is the balance of the virtues. And when we find ourselves being ashamed of who we are and wearing a mask and trying to impress other people, we're losing our own balance.

Physioutai (φυσιοῦται) **Puffed up, inflated**

Second word that's kind of interesting, again, it's a rare word. It's a variant of the word we get physics from. In the ancient world, they didn't know like the subatomic world or anything like that. So physics meant how things grow, the nature of growth. And this is growth that's not natural. This is like overgrowth. It's sometimes translated *puffed up*.

I like to think of it as the Hamburger Helper of ethics. It's like every credential runs this risk. That's why I prefer not to be called Reverend Rigby or Dr. Rigby, because I don't think authority is a good place from which to teach. If the goal is truth, then what difference does it make what my status is? You need to be asking the question, is it true or not? Not who said it.

I like to think of a puffer fish when I see this word, as inflating ourselves to try to look bigger. And the problem with that is that this can make us feel very hollow. When you think of yourself as your credentials, as your status, as your wealth, as anything that makes you look bigger, that can feel very small inside. When you think that's where your worth is coming from.

When you look at yourself, you are a miracle of the universe. You are the universe coming to consciousness, into being. That's not even a guess. I mean, any astrophysicist would agree. If the universe is the foundation of everything, you are the universe that has become conscious. How do you add to that?

I think of the political cartoon years ago where the comet came in, the asteroid that was going to destroy the dinosaurs came in, and the dinosaurs looked up and said, "Oh no, the economy." [laughter] The things we value can trick us into not valuing the things that really count.

The later we get in life, the more we realize that the relationships, simple health, all kinds of simple things, the beauty of nature, are the greatest treasures of all. So to realize that when something is added to your plate that you want, that's good, but it doesn't increase your value. If you think it's increasing your value, you've set yourself up.

Because when the tide turns, as it someday will, you'll think your value is less. So Paul is giving us a warning up front. Nothing adds to your value, nothing takes away from your value that happens to you. The last word we're looking at, it's actually a phrase.

Ou zetei ta (οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς) Does not seek its own way

It doesn't seek its own. Have you ever known people that only called you when they needed something? And they'd say something first, but it always worked back to something you could do for them? "You know, I've really missed you. How you doing? Oh, by the way... Can I borrow your truck to move the..."

There are people who confuse loving with controlling. And that can really mess your mind. When somebody doesn't want you to be who you are. They want you to be a bit player in their drama. That can really mess your mind up.

Love doesn't do that. We often think we've been hurt by love, but what we learn if we live long enough is love doesn't do that. That wasn't love.

When we love each other as possessions, that's not love. To love another person truly is to love them as other than yourself, as someone that has worth even if they don't give you anything. So this is a treasure that can avoid enormous pain.

I'm fascinated by the story of Milo... Yiannopoulos. Milo Yiannopoulos. He was a right-wing influencer. We have such weird titles now: right-wing influencer. He hated Muslims, hated women's rights, hated social justice. Sort of that movement: If your church is a social justice church, leave it. And he supported Trump completely.

And just found out he's being deported because he's a foreigner. If you're in the MAGA movement, just know that's your fate too. Every person, every person except for Donald Trump, in the MAGA movement will be betrayed. Every one of you.

If someone doesn't like diversity, they don't really like you. You're just useful. If you're from another country and you're saying, you're spewing out the same hate, that's useful for a while, but that circle gets smaller and smaller. That's where fascism leads. It gets smaller and smaller. And eventually it gets down to the one person. *[pause]*

Donald Trump has taught that winning is an ethical category. This is a devastating lie. To win at an ignoble cause, at an evil cause, is worse than losing. To lose a noble struggle is infinitely better for your soul than to win a shady deal. So essentially, the MAGA movement is like a termite in the soul of the United States.

And the way to survive that is to go into your own soul and monitor that. To keep your balance, to keep your dignity, to keep your virtue. And when you survive the storm, to be a light for people to discover and remember their own humanity because that's what it gets back down to when all is said and done.

Who was it? Oh, it's Will Rogers. I forgot. Who said:

Too many people spend money they earned to buy things they don't want to impress people they don't like. [laughter]

I like that. Probably the best president of my lifetime was Jimmy Carter, who was destroyed because he didn't play the games. Destroyed not because he was a bad leader, but because you can't have a good leader with bad citizens.

When you would rather have personal wealth than livable environment, you can't have a good president. When you want to just show up once a year to vote, or maybe not, but you don't stand as an active citizen and participant in democracy, that democracy cannot stand.

So we're being invited by this crisis to remember our dignity, to remember our responsibility. Jimmy Carter said this:

A strong nation, like a strong person, can afford to be gentle, firm, thoughtful, and restrained. It can afford to extend...

[coughing] I apologize. I'm getting it looked into. Everybody else is going to be coughing too before the end of this. Let me start that again.

A strong nation, like a strong person, can afford to be gentle, firm, thoughtful, and restrained. It can afford to extend a helping hand to others. It's a weak nation, like a weak person, that must behave with bluster, boasting, and rashness, and other signs of insecurity.

We don't have to discover the way out of this. That is the old story. When other people choose cruelty, we choose kindness. When other people choose lies and propaganda, we open ourselves

to truth. We do fact checks outside our comfort zone, and we lift up our humanity, and we lift up nature and realize that is the treasure.

Nothing adds to nature. Nothing adds to human nature either. So we take off our masks. We let ourselves be as small as we really are. If the man in Tiananmen Square had been wearing a Rambo suit, it would have been less. His smallness, his vulnerability showed the weakness of empire.

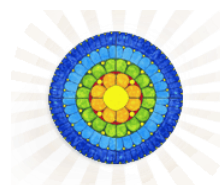
If this week you simply live as a human being, it will be the most revolutionary response you can make to what is happening in our country. You can be a light this week simply by being fully human. And it's the greatest gift you could give this world.

Well, that's my understanding of this passage. We'll take a moment for you to think how you would have preached it. Let me know if you do better. *[laughter]*

Benediction
Rev. Erica Knisely

May love give you the courage to lay down your false self, to melt away the masks that you wear, and bravely walk in the warmth of your true self. Thank you. May you find joy in being you, just as you are. In grace, may you invite others to do the same. Amen.

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