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SERMON TITLE: *Reflection*
SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a
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Tonight I want to speak on one of the most beloved Scripture passages in the Bible.

If I were to ask you what is probably the most well-known Scripture passage or verse in the Bible, what would you say? (Psalm 23, John 3:16)

The Lord is my shepherd . . . (*I shall not be in want*)
He makes me lie down in . . . (*green pastures*)
He leads me beside . . . (*still waters*)

What a beautiful picture of God's loving care in action.

For God so loved the world that ... (*he gave his only begotten son*)
That whosoever believes in him ... (*shall not perish but have eternal life*)

What a beautiful picture of God's power and hope.

There is another well-known and powerful picture of God's love. Here's the one of which I speak:

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. *Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever.*

That famous passage was written by Paul to First Presbyterian Church Corinth (just kidding!); and now to us at First Presbyterian Church Duncanville. Tonight let us see this very famous passage about love through the eyes of God's love.

We have always taken these words in 1 Corinthians 13 as if instructions for us on how to be loving. And it is! But tonight let's stretch our vision. Let's see the passage as pertaining to God's love. What if we take this passage as speaking to us about what God's love for us is like. If we see Paul's words as only instructions pertaining to us, then we miss something big;

something magnificent and rich. Let's expand our experience of God's love for you and me.

On the last night Jesus was with his disciples they were gathered for dinner. Jesus knew the next twenty-four hours would rock their faith in God to the core. The truth was, they had a fuzzy view on Jesus' connection with God and so Jesus had to draw that connection into focus.

Jesus isn't just a good teacher, or someone whose principles we follow, although both those things are true. Jesus is someone much more, much greater.

He said to Philip on the last night before his death, "Philip, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!" (John 14:9). Philip had said, "If you'll just show us the Father then we will believe!" So what if 1 Corinthians 13 actually expresses the Father's love.

If we see Jesus as exhibiting the Father's love, we'll begin to see the Father's love.

You have heard people say "God is love" or "the love of God" or "God is loving." That's grasping a little piece of the truth but there is so much more. Do you experience the freedom that God's love brings? Sometimes Christians are in bondage by not knowing God's love for them.

We have lost a lot of freedom in 2020. We live with restrictions we have never had in my lifetime. We live with fear. But God says, "love is never defeated." Love is never brought to the ground; it persists. Think of Jesus on the cross. Jesus acted in love in the worst circumstance. But I am getting ahead of myself.

First Paul tells us "**love is patient and kind.**" That's passive—being patient. Other words to describe it are persevering, longsuffering, forbearing. The Bible says, "God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Isaiah said, "Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you."

God is patient with you. When you are impatient with yourself, tell yourself, *God is patient with me.* Ask God to break your attitude toward yourself because God is not as hard on you.

"**Love is kind.**" Kind means "active goodness." Let's think of some examples—the Bible has thousands of examples of God's mercy.

His mercies are new every morning.

Remember Hagar? She was the maidservant of Sarah. Abraham slept with her. Then she was jilted by her master, Sarah; with the baby; alone; in the desert; no money and nowhere to turn. Her life was very dark and bitter. But God spoke to her, gave her food and water, and provided for her so that she and her child would not only survive, but thrive. She was so amazed she called God “the God who sees me.”

God is kind. Jesus expresses that same kindness again and again.

Remember the lepers? They were social outcasts but Jesus touched and healed all that he encountered, whether one or ten. Whether they were thankful or not, he was still kind to them.

God sends sunshine and rain on the good and bad alike, whether they even acknowledge he exists or not.

What about the woman with the issue of blood. She snuck up on Jesus and touched his robe to gain his healing without him noticing. That didn't work! Jesus is so aware of you and your need, that he turns to you and seeks you out.

Paul says, **Love does not envy.** Envy means you set yourself up against others—“rivalry.” Think of the rivalry among siblings. They often want to one up each other for a parent's attention. So think of how Jesus came: born in a stable; his parents were poor; humble and riding on a donkey into Jerusalem. He identifies with people from all walks of life. He does not try to “one up” anyone.

Love does not boast. He's not into calling attention to himself. When Jesus realized people were intent on making him a king after he fed the 5,000, he withdrew. He did not make a show—like jumping off the temple so everyone would be in awe of him. Usually when he healed someone, he said, “Don't tell anyone, go tell a pastor. Go to church and thank God.” Jesus also pointed people to God through everyday signs all around them. “Look at the birds of the air, and your Heavenly Father feeds them. . . . So do not worry; he cares for you. Strive first to know him.” (Matthew 7:25-34 excerpts)

Next we read: **Love is not proud.** Arrogance is pride. The Pharisees were arrogant, trying to force Jesus to prove himself. Jesus did not give in to their arrogance; he continued to teach even them about God.

Love is not rude, self-seeking, or easily angered. Jesus is the polar opposite of these words.

In fact, **love keeps no record of wrongs.** This is the one we probably need to hear most of all tonight. This is the core of Jesus Christ, and of God: FORGIVENESS. It includes forgiving and forgetting. You might hear people say “I forgive you, but I won't forget.”

With God, love is not that way. It is displayed clearly in Christ. With God, no score is settled later. There will be no reckoning; that is, holding your sins against you. Jesus wipes your

slate is clean. Did you get that? Jesus keeps no records of your wrongs. What a gift! He does this because he does not delight in evil and his mercy is new every morning. No, Jesus rejoices in the truth.

Are you living in bondage or freedom?

The truth is, if you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father.

Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, on a cold winter's night, born in a stall, laid in a manger, glorified by heavenly hosts, worshiped by shepherds and kings so that . . .

Whosoever believes in him should not perish but instead, receive eternal life.

This is no ordinary good teacher. This is our King, full of the character of love.

Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in. RECEIVE HIM. RECEIVE LOVE.

AMEN