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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: 1 Corinthians 13:4
Title of sermon: What is Love?
Series: What Matters Most - #2

1 Cor. 13:4 NIV:

13 ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

When I was a little kid, we used to play this game -- I don't know, probably went all the way back before I was a kid, and it was called "Telephone" -- and you would say something, you'd have a line or something like that, and you'd say it, and you'd whisper it in the other person's ear, and the goal was to see how far you could get around, you know, eight, ten, 12 people. It was one of those icebreakers that you did -- I never went to a shower, so I don't know when we did this. But -- it was one of those icebreakers -- and so, you'd go all the way around, and by the time you got done, eight, ten people, that person would say the sentence that you started with. I played that game a score of times -- never once did that person 10 people later ever communicate what the person who started said. Why? Because communication's kind of a hard thing. It is. I discovered that what happens in "Telephone" -- eight, ten people -- can happen with just one person when you get married. You can say something, and your spouse thinks another thing, and -- my wife speaks woman, and I speak men. And -- that's two different languages. It is. She's much better at communication. I'm working on it. By the time we hit 50 years -- which is not all that far away, Hon -- I tell you what -- 50 years that she has been trying to domesticate me. That's pretty amazing. But communication's one of those things. And one of the reasons, a score of them, is because in English we have certain words that we use in a variety of different ways. It's the same word. So, we use the same word for, like, "I love pizza." And I do. I -- you might say, "I love the Seahawks," or, for those of you who believe in miracles, "I love the fact that the Beavers are in the Elite Eight." Can I hear an "Amen"? Because it's the only time I'm going to get to say that! I mean, the last time was, what, 1968 or something like that? Ha! Back before some of you were born! Well, I love them. And we men will say, "I love to hunt!" or "I love to fish!" I say, "I love to catch ... fish!" That was supposed to be funny. Don't worry about it. I don't like fishing -- I like catching. And then, we say -- to your spouse -- "I love you." Same word. Same exact word. What makes the difference? The context. The context is everything. But when the context is everything, sometimes communication problems can happen.

In the Bible, that word that we're looking at, what matters most -- we're in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, and we'll be there for eight weeks. We're gonna jump out one week, next week for Easter -- same theme. But the question we're wrestling with, when Paul said, "If you don't have love, you don't have anything. You can speak in the tongues of men and angels, you can have faith to do all kinds of things, and if you don't love people, then all of those things" -- you can create the most incredible business, you can have the most amazing invention. You can have wealth beyond imagination. And if you don't love people, Paul says, you don't have anything. It's a zero when you get before God at the throne that He brings judgment to us. So, what we want to do is, we want to look at these next weeks as what does it mean to love? What does it look like? And we're gonna slow this way down. I haven't done this in a long time. I'm gonna take eight weeks and look, and some days, just like today, we're only gonna look at two words. We're gonna drill way down, and we're gonna kinda go down and unearth this question, what does it mean to love? And the reason is, because it can be used in a variety of ways -- in our English words, we use one and the context determines it. In the Scriptures, the word is not driven by context as much but by the word.

There are multiple different kinds of words, a variety of what you would call varieties of love. In the Scriptures, you have a word that is called *phileo*, or it's a brotherly love. It's, "Brother, I love you." It's something you would say to your family. I love my family. You're not being erotic in that moment, you're not necessarily saying you're going to sacrifice, that might be another word, but if you say "I love my family, I love my church, I love my country, I love the fact that I was born here," you're using the term -- you would use the term *phileo*. It's a word that connotes -- it's quite often used in the Scriptures. It's a word that we get other words, like at Delphi, or Philadelphia -- brotherly love -- or *anthropos*, the word we get philanthropy from. It's the love of humans. A person that is philanthropic is a person who loves people. And a person -- it's a brotherly love, it's a care, it's a kindness.

There's another word, and this word is used -- it's not in particular used in the Scriptures. It is a word of *eros*. It is a, "Baby, I love you." It is a thing that you would say to your spouse. But the Greeks, when they were defining this term, didn't use it in such a narrow way. When we translate the word love into this language, the English language, and we are thinking of something that is passionate, kind of emotional and erotic, then we use this term *eros*. They didn't use it in just that narrow way. They would use the term *eros* when they were describing something of a movement, something of an awe -- when you would stand at the kind of precipice of the Grand Canyon you would look out, and you would just think, "This is beautiful," you would use the term *eros*. You're not describing something that's erotic -- you're describing something that is breathtaking. When you stand at the edge of the ocean, and you say, "This is breathtaking." If you go up to Mt. Hood, and you get rid of all the city lights, and you go up there in the middle of July, and you look up and you see all the stars, and you realize, "God, you named every one of them," and you're just taken with worship -- the Greeks would use the term *eros*. So, it's not just this narrow form of eroticism, but it's something much broader in the sense of awe. Beauty. Movement. Interestingly enough, *eros* is really never used in the New Testament -- maybe the reason is because it was often used in terms of pagan worship.

But there is one that's used in the New Testament. In fact, it is almost supremely used and narrowly used, I would say, in sacred writing. If you read classical Greek, go back and if you took Greek and you started reading the classics, you would rarely see this word. You've heard the word -- *agape*. You've seen it on people's T-shirts. What does that mean? You would use it if you were describing not an emotion, not a brotherly love, but a volitional choice -- I love you. It would be a term that describes a sacrifice. It would be a term that is not necessarily void of emotion but is not driven by emotion at all. It's the kind of word that Jesus used in John 13, one of my all-time favorite stories. It's toward the end of Jesus's life here on this earth. It's on this coming week's Thursday that this event takes place. You can read it in John 13. Jesus gathers His disciples together, and they're going to have their last supper together. It's in that moment that Jesus picks up a towel, puts it over His arm, takes a basin of water, and sits before every one of His disciples. But He says this at the very beginning -- "He got up and was going to show them the full extent of His love." What word did He use? Not *eros*. Not *phileo*. But *agape*. He was going to show them the full extent of His love. Why? Because He was going to demonstrate to them. In other words, He shows us what love is by showing us what love does. That's *agape*. It's a sacrifice. It's the reason why Jesus said, "I want you to not just love your friends, but I want you to love your enemies." "How on earth can I love my enemies? I don't like them." And Jesus says, "I don't care if you don't like them. Love them." How can you assign us with that? It's because love is not an emotion, it's not a feeling, it's not a brotherly love. It's not an affection for my country. It's not a passion for my wife. It is a what? Sacrificial volitional choice to do something for the benefit of another person. He shows them what love is by showing them what love does. It's a sacrifice.

On that evening, this Thursday, when we celebrate that day, the Passover, I'm often struck by what happened in that room. Go back there with me for a moment. It's recorded in John 13 that Jesus knelt before Peter, and we know that, and He knelt before Peter, and said, "Peter, I want to wash your feet." And remember, Peter said to Jesus, "You're not washing my feet. You're my Rabbi, you're not washing my feet." And Jesus said, "Uh -- if you don't let me wash your feet, how are you ever gonna let me wash your whole body? Let me translate that for you -- if you don't let me serve you by washing your feet, how

are you ever gonna let me serve you by dying for you and saving you?" But do you know who else was in that room? Judas. And I've often wondered about that moment, where Jesus knelt before Judas. It was approximately Tuesday, we think, where Judas had negotiated the price -- four months' wages that he was gonna get for betraying Jesus. That was Tuesday -- today's Thursday. Have you ever asked yourself the question, "Why did Jesus wash his feet?" Did you ever take it to the next step? What did Jesus hope would come out of that moment? You see, I think it was still possible on that Thursday that Jesus was reaching for Judas's heart. "You don't have to walk down this path. You don't have to do this, Judas." Oh, I know it was prophesied, but I think even in that moment, as Jesus is washing Judas's feet, He's giving him the opportunity to experience grace. He's giving him the opportunity to experience love. But Peter teaches us, you don't have to accept the love of Christ -- you can reject it. Peter for a moment did -- "You're not gonna wash my feet," and then Jesus pressed a little bit, and Peter did. But Judas -- Jesus washed his feet, I don't think Judas ever let him love him. But Jesus in that moment shows us what love does. Paul tells us.

In this text, we find ourselves in verse four tonight, Jesus shows us what love is by showing us what it does. What does it do? Well, number one, Paul says, love is patient. Now I guarantee you, if I was writing this list I wouldn't start with this one. I wouldn't. Do you know when you see patience? You see patience when somebody's immature. You see patience when somebody's angry with you and they're not controlling their mouth. You see patience when somebody is taking a detour and they need to drive a straight line. You need patience when you're teaching your child the same thing for the 15th time -- or your husband, whatever the case may be. You need patience when you're having to adjust your pace to somebody else. I'd never start off with patience, because it's almost like telling God -- "Send me trials." But that's where Paul starts. Love is patient. Why? Because God is. God is infinitely patient. In fact, the term we get from the Scriptures that describes another form of patience is called longsuffering. The word is a combination of two words -- long-tempered. The opposite of short-fused. What does it mean to be longsuffering? It means to be long-tempered, it means to be a person that can withstand a frustrating moment and not lash back. It's a person who doesn't run around the house yelling at everyone, trying to get them to understand what you're doing. It's a person that has a sense of reserve, and even a passivity -- not that they're a passive person, but they're willing to slow down and operate at somebody else's pace.

The Scripture says it was your patience -- God speaking this way, it was your patience that let me or gave me space to repent. It was your patience, God, that gave me the ability to turn around, in Romans 2:4. I can think back -- I grew up in the church. My mom prayed for me. She taught me. But I went a lot of years. And it's not that I didn't believe in God -- I just didn't want to surrender to God. I knew one day I wanted to get around to following God, but I wanted to have some fun, and I kinda thought God was a killjoy, so it's like, why sign up for his train, when maybe I'll do it down the road? It's not an uncommon thing. And God, in His patience -- I mean, I did some dumb things. I mean -- multiple accidents. I could've ended my life and God just kind of gently says, "Ah, he'll get around to it." And I did. Not fast. I didn't come to God from the moment that I saw and heard the truth. I pushed Him back. I asked for a -- kind of a TDY [temporary duty assignment] -- I wanted to take a little train and go do my own thing. God's patience gave me space to repent. God's patience turned, the Scripture says, us "from vessels of wrath to vessels of grace." We were vessels of wrath. We were vessels destined towards wrath. And God's patience turned us and turned us from people who were bent towards destruction to become trophies and objects of grace. It was His patience.

God's patience comes to us in the fruit of the Spirit. See, when the Spirit of God is working in your life, one of the characteristics that's going to be there -- love, joy, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, longsuffering. Long-fused. That's what Paul says is going to be your gift of love to people. He says that you can be patient -- why? Because God's been patient with you. You can be patient because God gave space to you. You can be patient because the Holy Spirit is working in you, and you don't get it quickly every time, do you? You can be patient with other people because God has been patient with you. He has given you time to come to maturity. He's given you time to discover the truth.

He's given you time to surrender, and because of that, Paul says, because God has loved you, you can love other people with patience. You don't have to have everything at your time. The person helping you at the store doesn't have to be perfect. You can be patient! Why? Because maybe they're having a bad day. And maybe sometimes when somebody brings you, you know, some food, and they don't get it right -- I've seen Christians absolutely just undress a waiter, in a sense of just tearing 'em apart, as if they've never made a mistake in their life. As if they'd gotten it right every time.

Paul says one of the ways you're gonna demonstrate that the life of Christ is in you and that the Spirit of God is alive in you is that you're going to be understanding, longsuffering, long-fused, patient with people. And -- he says, you're gonna be kind. Patience is the willingness to suspend retribution. Kindness is the act that you give instead of your anger. They really go together wonderfully. They're two sides of the same coin. Patience is a passive stand. It's not doing something. Patience is waiting. It's sitting. But it's not really active. When you're patient, you wait. When you're patient, you don't say anything. When you're patient, you give other people time. When you're patient, you're passive. But the flip side of that, when you're kind, you're active. Now -- sometimes, some people would look at this word "kindness" and think, well, that's kinda milktoast. That's all that a Christian will do? Love is patient, love is kind -- that's it? Doesn't seem very powerful. Ah -- but it is. Kindness is what you receive when you've bunged up your knee, and it's all filled with gravel, and somebody is kind by the way they treat you, and they clean it, and they do it with a sensitivity that you can hardly even feel it. Kindness is a person. Years ago, I needed to make a drive to help a family member that was in trouble. And I was gonna go alone, and this person found out that I was going, and he said, "Hey, I'll ride with you" -- it was an eight-hour drive. He took time off work, he cleared his schedule, and we jumped in the car and we went. He wasn't very active. He sat there when I was addressing the situation at hand, and he prayed. He'd help me debrief. He gave me a gift of kindness. It was his presence. He gave me his wisdom. Most of all he gave me his time.

A number of years ago, if you remember, when Promise Keepers was happening around the United States, I went to a number of those events. All of mine were in Colorado. But there was one in particular that a friend of mine went to when it was in Washington DC. There were a million men who gathered there in Washington DC, and on the way in, my friend was marching in with a group of guys that he went with, and there were all kinds of people protesting him. And they were throwing up signs, and they were protesting -- it's a bunch of ladies who were kind of accusing these guys of Promise Keepers of being a bunch of chauvinists. As people were walking along, he noticed some of the guys would pull out of their backpacks bottles of water and just hand it to these ladies who were cursing at 'em and protesting them and all kinds of things. But one of them he watched, it was a younger guy -- the guy went up, it was hot, it was Washington, DC -- it was the summertime -- and the sun was blistering. And this guy goes up to this lady, my friend watched, and he hands her a bottle of water, and he goes, "Let me hold your sign for you." He takes the sign and he puts it up, and he's protesting himself with her sign, and she's cracking the bottle, and he stands there and just talks with her. My friend said, of all the things he witnessed that weekend, great preaching, phenomenal singing, he said the one thing that hit him most deeply was a young man who was kind to a woman who was screaming at him. He held her sign. He stood there and talked with her when she drank the water that he gave. The next day, in the Washington newspaper, one of the parks guys said, "It's like an event that we've never seen in the capital. When we went in to clean it up the day following, it had already been done." He said, "It was the cleanest event that we've ever seen for a million men. They were kind."

Paul says if you want to show people what love is, you show them what love does. It is willing to be patient when a person doesn't get it. And the reason you can do that is because God has been patient with you when you didn't get it. It is being kind to a person -- not just passively, but taking that extra step, buying them something, doing something, saying something, being present -- why? Because your very gift might change their life in a significant way. Those unexpected acts of kindness, Paul says, go a long way. Like washing another person's feet. Like traveling eight hours to simply be a friend. Like offering somebody a bottle of water when they're cursing at you -- or maybe even holding their sign so that they can drink it.

When you love people that way, it makes a ripple. It does. Ashley Jones made a ripple. But it really wasn't Ashley, it was Sarah who made the ripple. One day Ashley Jones walked into a Target -- she's a 27-year-old young lady -- who walked in. The stresses of COVID were getting to her, like everybody else, and she decided she wanted to read more. So she walked into Target and she was browsing around, and she found a book that -- well, it caught her eye. So, she bought it. She went home. She was thumbing through it, and her dog came and barked at the door, and it kind of startled her, and she dropped the book, and she noticed a five-dollar bill fell out of this book. Along with the five-dollar bill was a note. And on that note, it read this -- "To the person who buys this book -- I'm having a tough day, and I thought maybe I could brighten someone else's with this little surprise. I want you to go buy a coffee or a doughnut or even a face mask. Practice some self-care today, and remember you're loved. You're an amazing person, you're strong, and you're gonna make it." Ashley was astonished by the simple act of kindness -- five bucks. She posted it on Twitter, and it went viral, and people picked it up, and it was picked up in a newspaper, and they read it, and it went further and further. And all of a sudden Ashley began to get feedback. One of 'em was from her dad. Her dad wrote her, "Honey, you inspired me. I was in line the other day, and I bought the person's groceries in front of me. It felt so good to be kind." Another person dedicated his kindness to his deceased 19-year-old daughter. He said, "Every time I'm kind to somebody, Ashley, it makes me feel like she's alive." Ashley committed every week, very simply, every week, "I will do something intentionally that is kind to another person." And the ripple of that five dollars has touched thousands.

Why be kind to people? It's not a simple little milktoast word. Why be patient? It's not something that you laugh off. You might change a person's life. You might do one single act and it ripples into a thousand different people. And when you do, it makes your city different. Makes your church different. It makes your workplace different. And that's why Paul said, "Let them see what love is by showing them what love does." It's patient and it's kind, and when you do it, it can ripple to thousands.

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