

On a day like today when the sky is gray, the rain is coming down, there's a wind blowing, it's very easy for an Englishman to feel at home. Then there are other things that happened to me which make me realize that I'm not at home. For instance, I'm still amazed, but it's so true that Californians are very friendly and nice. I've come from a city where you'd never dream of saying hello to anyone in the streets unless you knew them very well or you were related to them, closely.

On my first couple of days here I noticed how people were greeting me all over the place and inquiring at some length as to how my day was going. I simply assumed that these were people who'd either seen me at the church or read The Chimes, who I'd met in some context. It took me a day and a half to realize that actually they weren't all church people. They were all just being nice to me and friendly.

In this magnificent reading that we've heard from 1 Corinthians, Paul is saying much more than just be nice and friendly to each other. He's talking there about love, and he spells out in detail what it means to go beyond being friendly to what love looks like when it's worked out in daily life. I've preached dozens of times on that great reading, nearly always at weddings. It works at weddings because it's a beautiful celebration of love, but it's actually a reading that's not about marriage. It comes after the passage we were looking at last week in 1 Corinthians 12 where St. Paul was describing the church as the body of Christ. You may remember I was talking about that image of the body being an image which shapes our understanding of who we are as a group of people.

One might say that last week's epistle told us who we are as a church and today's reading goes on to say how we're to relate to each other in that context. I'm going to stick with this glorious chapter from 1 Corinthians 13 and look at that rather tricky gospel reading in the context of that chapter. The problem with talking about 1 Corinthians 13 is it's not just a familiar text, but it's a beautiful text. It's fantastic language and poetry full of such rich images.

It's hard to know as a preacher what you can say that will add to that and not simply detract from such beautifully well-chosen words, so I'll keep it simple. I'll restrict myself to just Verses 4 and 5, where our second paragraph begins on our sheet. In those 2 verses alone, there are loads of words that could describe dozens of

sermons, but I'll stick just to 3 positive statements that Paul expresses there. He says, "Love is patient, love is kind, and love rejoices in the truth."

Firstly, love is patient. I'm having to learn patience on your roads over here. I haven't made it to a car yet. I'm still on a bike, and I'm struggling to get used to your intersections. I rode my bike up Nautilus the other day and went to turn left on Fay and I was waiting at a filter [*left turn, ed.*], and I think I set a world record for staying at a traffic light, because I'm sure that the light next to me went from green to red 8 times whilst I was waiting just to turn left, but that isn't the kind of patience that St. Paul is talking about in this passage.

The King James version of the Bible doesn't use the word "patience." It talks about long-suffering. The word is "suffers long," which is a much more accurate translation of the Greek where two words are put together, "long" and "anger." St. Paul here is talking about the kind of patience that we need when dealing with other people. If we're patient in this kind of way, in a long-suffering kind of way, we don't get mad when people do the things which upset us, and that's not easy even, or maybe especially, in a church context. As the old saying goes, "To live above with saints we love, ah, that will be glory. To live below with saints we know, now that's a different story."

This patient kind of love covers a multitude of things, or to put it another way, love covers a multitude of irritations. Love covers a multitude of annoyances. Love overlooks things that would otherwise make us behave badly. We're called to love in that long-suffering, patient kind of way because we know that that's how God loves us. There's a story in the Hebrew tradition of Abraham, who's sitting outside his tent one evening when he saw an old man weary from age and a long journey coming towards him. Abraham, as was the custom, rushed out, greeted him, and invited him to join him in his tent. There he washed the old man's feet and gave him food and drink.

Then immediately, the old man began to eat without saying a prayer or a blessing. Abraham asked him, "Don't you worship God?" The old traveler replied, "I worship fire and reverence no other god." When he heard this, Abraham became incensed, grabbed the old man by the shoulders and threw him out of his tent into the cold night air. When the old man had departed, God called to his friend Abraham and asked where the

stranger was. Abraham replied, "I forced him out because he didn't worship you." God answered, "I've suffered him these 80 years that he dishonors me. Could you not endure him one night?"

Love is patient, love is kind. I've been treated with a great deal of kindness since I arrived here, for which I'm very grateful, even this week. Last week I shared in my sermon my problems of getting into the ocean, which I now realize might have been lucky for me. Several people have taken the time to e-mail me with advice about places to try to swim, things to wear when swimming and so on. They've thought of me and taken the time to write, and I appreciate that. Simple acts of kindness always go down well.

There was a woman called Mabel. She went to her post office regularly because the employees there were friendly. She was there one day to buy stamps just before Christmas. There was a long queue. Someone pointed out to her that there was a machine on the side that sold stamps. She said, "Thanks for telling me, but the machine won't ask about how my arthritis is."

We're to be kind because God is kind. Hear these remarkable words in Isaiah Chapter 54, "In a surge of anger, I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the Lord God Almighty." We've sung about that. God is love. What an amazing thought that the God who we worship is loving and kind. That's something I want to share with our community, those who don't come to St. James on a Sunday morning, who don't know God. I reckon if we went to such people and asked them what they thought of God, they'd write lots of things before they would write that God is kind.

We're used to that because we hear the stories from the Bible week after week. What an amazing thought we can so easily take for granted. It's not just that God loves us, but God is kind. How do we let people know that who don't know that? Jesus answered that question already in John's gospel. He said this, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another, if you're kind and patient with one another." If we show loving kindness to one another, so we will reflect to the world that divine love and kindness which we have all been shown in Christ Jesus. Remember, love talked about is easily ignored, but love demonstrated is irresistible.

The third positive statement in this passage about love is this, "Love rejoices in the truth." This is where our gospel reading comes in. It might have been easier from the preacher's point of view if the gospel said today was one of those many gospel readings where Jesus is kind and gentle with the people who come across his path, but that isn't what happens in the gospel reading set for today. That is no loving that's going on in Nazareth. However, it does remind us that love is tough. It's not all about pastel shades and schmaltz. Love rejoices in the truth.

In this reading from the gospel Jesus has gone back to his hometown and he's preached at his home synagogue. It's fair to say that he disappointed his hearers. He didn't tell them what they wanted to hear. After announcing himself as the Messiah, he makes it clear that his mission isn't just for them. He reminds them of two stories of famous prophets in the Old Testament, and in both cases the prophets went not to the people of Israel but to the Gentiles. It was this scandalous message that angered the people so. Now I won't go into more detail here. Suffice it to say that Jesus' love for his hearers didn't prevent him from speaking God's truth to them.

What does all this mean to us here at St. James this morning? Of course, the reading is an encouragement to be kind and patient with one another, to live up to the calling that we have to be the body of Christ in this place. I want to go and adjure one thing inspired by the words that we've heard sung so beautifully by Leonard Bernstein, "Build my house of love."

There is amongst us a recognition that a new chapter is opening up here at St. James. We're in a good place. Last week at the annual meeting, we were hearing about the strong foundations that have been built in recent years, foundations on which we can build, but the question remains, what are we to build? I can hear St. Paul speaking to us in answer to that question, and this is what I can hear him saying, "You can have the most busy programs, you can have hundreds of children in your Sunday School, you can have a beautiful sanctuary in which to worship, you can feed thousands of homeless people, but if you do not have love, you are nothing. As we look to build on our strong foundations in the weeks, the months, the years to come, let's look to build a house of love."