

## The Power of Love 4 Epiphany C

Love is patient and kind. It is courteous. It is able to see the other point of view. It is easygoing. It rejoices in the good and what is true. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Is there anything love can't do?

Love can not force the human will or it ceases to be real love. I need to be reminded of that. I think we all do. Love, selfless and sacrificial, can be a powerful healing agent. Its power is described by the apostle in the famous passage from the second lesson we heard. It has the quality of pure milk, like the stuff that a mother gives to her baby. True love can not be counterfeited. Again, true love will not try to force the will of another.

Yet true love as described in the letter to the Corinthians, is something we can and should expect from God and from each Christian. It is, after all the nature of God to love in this way. It is the nature of love as revealed in Jesus Christ.

It is this nature of love that must be developed in every disciple of Christ. The outside world judges how true we Christians are to this selfless love. We have to make it part of who we are; for both strangers and in our personal relationships. Jesus commanded us to love each other the way He loved us.

This type of love knows no gender. It is neither male nor female.

Ladies, this true love is what you give anyone you have a relationship with. Do you show love without strings attached? Do you love no matter what you receive in return, as Christ did?

And Men, the same is true for you. The way Jesus loved His disciples is the way we men must also love. Have your personal expectations kept you from loving completely?

Have you loved the way the other person needs to be loved, or what *you think* they need?

These things are challenging for all of us. Many times we forget that Jesus commanded us to love in this way. This love has no agenda other than to give of itself to another completely. Who would not want this kind of love? It is mature love. It is deeply embracing love. We all want this love. We pursue it in all shapes and ways that are not satisfying. Like the saying "looking for love in all the wrong places". And until we learn to give this selfless love, it will be difficult for us to recognize it in others.

King Solomon in all his wisdom wrote of this love in Song of Solomon (8:7) "Many waters can not quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house it would be utterly scorned." Houses, chocolate, vacations ... what would a person trade for such penetrating love? Was Solomon writing of his own mistaken trades for such love?

Many people have given up this pure love for such things, sadly. The people of Jesus' hometown were not aware of the love available to them. In the synagogue Jesus read to them of the promise of God in scripture. Just hearing Jesus' words fulfilled the prophecy for them. They needed only to embrace the words and the One

who loved them. But Jesus knew they were a shallow people. They wanted what they wanted. Their desires did not include the healing love that the great Physician offered. And Jesus, the giver of embracing, mystical love, knew they would rather have a counterfeit than the real McCoy.

J.K. Rowling in her Harry Potter series has Harry battling Voldemort and resists being caught up by the dark wizard's power play. He does so with the words of his teacher and mentor Professor Albus Dumbledore ringing in his ears. At the close of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Dumbledore gives Harry a pearl of wisdom that is the most important insight in all the Harry Potter books: *Love is the greatest power in the world*. Despite all the magical force displayed by the characters in the stories, the most magical force of all is presented as love.

Magic can not counterfeit true love. Romantic love will not take its place either. No waving of a magic wand can reproduce the hard work of such love as demonstrated in the life of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus' love is already fulfilled by what He gave us. As Christians we have the tools to give this kind of love that we have heard about this morning. And each of us must choose to embrace this love, understand it fully and then share it with each other. Without demands; without expectations or strings...to love no matter what happens around us, just as Jesus did in His life. We are nothing without this love. God, help us to embrace this power and use it for the good of your kingdom. Amen.