



# Love remains



A sermon starter for the 2022 One Great Hour of Sharing

*"And now these three remain faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."*

*~1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV*

What does love look like for your congregation? Can love be given and received via Zoom, FaceTime, through a glass window, or behind a face covering? In a post-pandemic reality, we are rethinking what love feels and looks like, aren't we? Fortunately, Paul reminds us that while the delivery may be different, love remains the same. Although we read parts of 1 Corinthians 13 at wedding and anniversary ceremonies, Paul wrote this letter to a church in crisis. All his work to bring people to Christ is on the verge of dissolving and his pastoral work, done remotely, is unraveling.

The congregation at Corinth started well. Paul and his associates gathered a widely diverse group of people who committed themselves to living the life of Jesus Christ. They formed a community and focused on the common good. When Paul left them, the Corinthian congregation was growing and thriving. Then, things started to fall apart as the members reverted to old patterns: the community began honoring the rich over the poor, the religiously gifted over those gifted differently, the educated over the illiterate, men over women, and adults over children. In the early days, the Corinthians celebrated and embraced their diversity—each person valued for their uniqueness, each one's gifts celebrated as they all contributed to the whole. But now, their differences are problems. Paul issues a return to love.

In Paul's encomium on love, he uses the Greek agape nine times to emphasize its importance to and for communal life. For him, love is an expression of commitment to a life in community; one that values each person and the gifts they bring. Every contributor is celebrated because they are now family—biology did not matter as much to Paul as the theology of community, church, and communion. His image of the Body of Christ emphasizes that each person, each part of the Body is vital, important, and necessary for the thriving of the whole.

What does love look like for Paul? It is patient and gentle. It is not envious, boastful, arrogant, rude, selfish, irritable, or resentful—all the things the Corinthians were exhibiting! Christian unity was turning into Christian bickering—not the behavior expected of siblings in Christ. Paul's letter is a reminder to the folks at Corinth that God calls them to a better way—a way that is centered in love and results in unity while respecting differences; a way that sees in the other a kinship that transcends familial boundaries; a way that serves others from a place of love; a way that values others for who and what they are. The way that Paul points to is about faith and hope and love.

Howard Thurman grew up during the early 1900s in Daytona, Florida, where educational opportunities for Blacks were limited. There were only three high schools for Blacks in the entire state. The closest private church-related high school was in Jacksonville, about 90 miles away. His community pooled their resources to send him to further his education.

At the train station, Thurman learned he would have to pay extra to ship his rope-tied trunk and he did not have the money. Alone and dejected, he sat on the steps of the rail station. A stranger, a Black man, asked why he was crying. After Thurman explained his situation, the man paid the extra fare. Before Thurman could thank him, the man walked

away, and Thurman never saw him again. The dedication to his autobiography reads:

*To the stranger in the railroad station in Daytona Beach  
who restored my broken dream sixty-five years ago.*

Thurman went on to become a renowned scholar and theologian and influenced the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The stranger saw a young man in despair and his generosity made a difference—he expected nothing in return, he just saw a need and responded. The man may or may not have thought of his gift as an act of love, but it changed the trajectory of Thurman's life.

This is what One Great Hour of Sharing does for men and women, young and old, across the planet—it restores broken dreams, resurrects hope, and carves a path into the future.

What does love look like for your congregation?

As you prepare to receive the One Great Hour of Sharing offering, recount for your church what love looks like in your context. Share how your gifts make a difference for neighbors near and far whose names you do not know and whom you may never meet.

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, a constant refrain was “we will get through this—together!” That’s what love looks like—people willing to share their resources to make the way easier for others—offering hope, kindness, and care. Agape is love that is rooted in concrete acts of compassion: helping to rebuild after hurricanes and tornadoes; teaching farming methods as the climate changes; providing chickens to stave off poverty; and, yes, even paying the fare for a stranger at a railroad station.

Through all kinds of weather, and even in the unknown, love remains—and love lived in community transforms the world.

// *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1979), dedication page, 24-25