



race Church

The Rev. Dr. Matthew Calkins
Rector

AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Epiphany, January 31, 2016

Readings: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71; Romans 13:1-13

Sermon text: And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. Romans 13:13

If I speak with the eloquence of a poet or the passion of a prophet, but do not have love, I am a slick politician or a spiritual charlatan. If I can see the future and understand the past, if I plumb the mysteries of nature and have the powers of god, if I dam great rivers, move great mountains, and alter both atmosphere and sea, but do not have love, I am nothing, I am worse than nothing, I am a force of chaos and destruction.

If I give away all my wealth, eat nothing but vegetables grown organically, run marathons for charity, achieve the tenth stage of enlightenment, but do not have love, I gain nothing. All of my charitable, spiritual and athletic achievements are an empty boast, are reflect only the emptiness and lack of meaning in my life that I desperately try to fill—but cannot, without love.

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”

Everything else will end. Everything else points to and prepares us for love. Love has no end. Love is the end. God is love.

All the achievements of science and art, the great museum of human history, telescopes that see to the edge of the universe, computers that can calculate almost to infinity, theories that peer into the black holes of time—all we know or can know, all we say or can say, is yet only a part, a piece in the puzzle, a blossom on a planet orbiting a sun somewhere in one of billions of galaxies—all of which turn and bow and move offstage in a dance of birth, death and new creation whose creator has joined the dance.

And the force that moves the dancer to dance is love.

And our dance in time will end, and our knowing and our power will end. Even our hope and our faith will end. For what is hoped for will come, and what we believe by faith we will see. We will see our God face to face—not as now dimly, reflected in the mirror of metaphor and culture, human-limbed and limited. We will understand clearly—not as children trying to understand the mysteries of adult behavior and playing make believe. We will know then fully and not in part, just as we are known even now by God.

So religion, science and art—all the human forms of knowledge are useful and work to the good, if they are moved by love. Faith and hope are needed, for they guide us in the way of love.

“And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

Thank you, St Paul. We need your message again today, perhaps more than ever.

Let the people say, Amen.

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