

## Sermon in Two Parts, January 31, 2015:

### Vince Sawyer: "My Journey Continues" & Will Cardwell: "The Way of Love"

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#### "My Journey Continues"

Sermon by Vince Sawyer, January 31, 2016

*Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer. - Amen.*

READ: First 2 paragraphs from "Church of the Covenant" (1956)

You may have noticed that our sermon time in today's bulletin reads: "The Journey Continues". I don't remember how that came to be, but I think it is most appropriate. I have titled my sharing this morning as "My Journey Continues". As I pondered what I might say today, I thought about the times during our 46 years here that Judy and I considered leaving Lynchburg. In each case we decided against it. And each time this church community played an increasingly significant part in our decisions not to leave.

We moved to Lynchburg from Arlington in Northern Virginia in August of 1969. The Dodge Division of Chrysler Corporation had assigned me to a sales territory in May of that year. We were warmly welcomed to Lynchburg and its friendly and slower pace of life by our neighbors and the Church of the Covenant community. In February of 1970, due to a slowdown in sales, Chrysler reduced its workforce and I found myself unemployed. Judy and I were expecting our second child and we decided to explore employment opportunities here. Due at least in part to recommendations from two of my Dodge dealers, in March I was hired by what was then Fidelity National Bank, now part of Wells Fargo.

During the next 16 years as a commercial banker I learned a lot about loans and automated systems. A second opportunity to leave Lynchburg occurred in the early 1980's.

I was offered a position with a computer software company near Orlando, Florida. We gave the offer serious consideration. We looked at houses, checked out where our three children would go to school, where they might continue their ballet dancing lessons, swimming, soccer, etc. But at that point in my spiritual journey, even though I was not a Covenant Member, I had grown spiritually and had become very involved in the Outward -Journey dimensions of this community. Our decision to decline the offer probably was a good one. Six months after we made our decision, the Florida company was struggling financially and a significant layoff was the result.

In the fall of 1983, Bev Cosby preached a sermon on "Change" which prompted me to reassess where I was in my journey. It took a while but in November of 1984 I decided to become a Covenant Member. I joined Barbara Holdren and others as a member of the New Land Jobs Mission Group and my spiritual growth accelerated. (I have been a member of a Church of the Covenant Mission Group ever since.)

At the same time my spiritual growth was accelerating, my bank, known then as Fidelity American, merged with a Richmond bank and the headquarters of the new company (Central Fidelity) was in Richmond. At this point in my journey my roots in this community of faith were much deeper, and I made it clear that I would prefer to stay in Lynchburg. In the business world if you express a preference not to move to where senior management is located and where major decisions are made, that is most often perceived as a lack of commitment to your career with your employer. My work responsibilities required considerable travel to Richmond, and by 1986 I found myself unemployed again, but still in Lynchburg.

After eight years of employment at First Colony Life Insurance Company learning about and doing Quality Improvement work, in January 1994 I accepted an offer from New Land Samaritan Inns to work with The Gateway and Miriam's House. It was then that I realized I had found my life's calling. The work was stressful due to the ebb and flow of our financial situation at The Gateway, but it was exciting, and most importantly, it was the most fulfilling work I had ever done.

In 2003, I was let go by the New Land Samaritan Inns Board, and I found a new home at 201 Federal Street, the location of The Haven's office. The work with The Haven, and more recently with The Healing Place of Southwestern Virginia, has also been very fulfilling. There is no doubt in my mind that I am responding to God's call in my life, and my Mission Group meeting on Thursday afternoon is the most important meeting I have each week.

As my brother Alan would say, "long story short", I am here to stay for as long as I have breath. My journey continues as part of this amazing community, for which I am deeply grateful. Thank you for allowing me to be on the journey with you, and for letting me share this morning.

Amen.

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### **"The Way of Love"**

Sermon by Will Cardwell

Scripture: Love is Patient and Kind, 1 Corinthians 13

We are officially on our own and are now in the interim. We know that God's steadfast love and faithfulness is with us now as much as ever before. God's Spirit has guided us, shaped and molded our community as we have tried to follow Jesus for sixty-one years. We wonder what is ahead. But what a great tradition we have to help us; namely, our lovely setting on these acres, our time proven covenant one with another, the use of the lectionary scriptures to guide us daily and weekly and so much more. This first Sunday in the interim finds us with a great Biblical treasure as the Lectionary reading, I Corinthians 13. "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol".

We return to these beautiful and even poetic words from the Apostle Paul over and over. A British Bible scholar, G. Campbell Morgan, wrote that *examining* I Corinthians 13 is like dissecting a flower to understand it. If you tear it apart too much, you lose the beauty. Another British scholar, Alan Redpath, said that one could get a spiritual suntan from the warmth of this chapter.

With the help of others whom I will reference, I will try to dissect I Corinthians 13 a little

anyway and maybe we can still get a good kind of warmth from it.

Paul uses the Greek word Agape for what we translate as “love”. The ancient Greeks had four different words for love. Agape is not Eros (erotic love), Storge (family love) nor Phileo (brotherly affection.) Agape is a love that loves without changing. It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting repayment. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected. Agape love loves because it wants to; It gives because it loves; it does not love in order to receive. It can be defined as a sacrificial kind of love that has little to do with emotion; it has much to do with self-denial for the sake of another.

In I Corinthians 13, Paul **first** proclaims the supremacy of agape love. It is superior to spiritual gifts in and of themselves. David Edwards, in notes he made for our Wednesday study this week wrote that in the previous chapter, “[Paul] tried to get [the troubled Corinthian community] to focus on God’s work in them through the gifts and callings God gave to each one of them. But chapter 12 ends with a transition to the next thing Paul wants to say. It is the ultimate message and the ultimate point of striving for the community of Jesus—love.” Paul says that the most dramatic renunciations of self are, profitless without agape love.

**Second** Paul describes the characteristics of love. Two things love is: long-suffering and kind. Then eight things love is not: not envious, not proud, not arrogant, not rude, not cliquish, not touchy, not suspicious, not happy with evil. And then four more things love is: strong, believing, hopeful, and enduring.

**Third** Paul proclaims the permanence of love: Love will outlive all the gifts. He illustrates the temporary nature of the gifts and the permanence of love.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. To summarize he says love abides forever.

Again quoting David's remarks: Paul ends by saying that, actually, there are three things that abide, or last: faith, hope, and love. The word “abide” can also be: lasts, endures, remains,

lives on. “Faith” is trustful living, not beliefs. “Hope” is a kind of continual openness to what can be. These three things are what we can rely on. But of the three, love, or agape, is the greatest.

Some of the metaphors for love we hear, and sayings about love, can be helpful when they illuminate *Agape* love.

Here is one that really targets me. Its source is an English writer, Anita Brookner who said “Real love is a pilgrimage. It happens when there is no strategy, but it is very rare because most people are strategists.”

In October 1982, Bev Cosby preached that agape love helps the other to grow, that our love is hollow and stagnant unless it helps the other person to become who he or she is meant to become.

In January 1984, his message was about “Love as Vicarious Identification”. We do not say “but for the grace of God there go I”, but just say “there go I”. We empathize - live into - what a person is going through or feeling.

These are two challenging dimensions of love and there are many more...Many dimensions of Agape love we will be encountering forever.

In the TV series, “Seinfeld”, Aaron the “Close Talker” is a nice, kind person. Aaron is Elaine's new boyfriend who meets Jerry Seinfeld's overbearing parents Morty and Helen Seinfeld from Florida when they visit Jerry in his New York apartment. His apartment is where Jerry, Elaine and other self-centered and amoral thirty-something friends hang out. Aaron the Close Talker is full of life, and he can hardly contain his feelings when it comes to those elder Seinfelds: Morty and Helen. He loves 'em with all his heart and soul. Aaron enjoys going to the MET with them and they gleefully take horse and buggy-rides around the city. Mr. and Mrs. Seinfeld don't mind it when the Close Talker talks with his face too close to them. Elaine feels left out although the threesome doesn't intentionally exclude her from the fun and gallivanting. Elaine privately muses with Jerry about her boyfriend's puzzling conduct. “Nobody's *that* nice”, she complains to Seinfeld, “Aaron is... *certifiably* nice!”

Even if our love is not certifiable – we learn in I Corinthians 13 that love is known by how

it ACTS, said David Edwards in a sermon three years ago. Further David said love is patience, a willingness to endure over the long haul and a kindness that honors each person's being, because we recognize that each and all belong first to God. Love is free of envy and the need to call attention to itself.”

“Love is patient and kind”. This simple teaching from Paul can carry us a long way:

Mother Teresa said that what everyone needs most of all is a sense of being valued and loved. She also said: “Love is a fruit in season at all times and within the reach of every hand. Anyone may gather it and no limit is set. Everyone can reach this love through meditation, prayer, sacrifice and an intense inner life”.

These words support our covenant one with another, especially these disciplines:

We covenant to:

Devote time each day for my inward journey, including silence, prayer, reading and study of the Bible and other writings that nourish and bring growth to my spiritual life, and reflection on my relationship to God, others and the world.

- and -we covenant to

Endeavor in every relationship to be a channel of God's love and forgiveness.

As we journey, our commitment to these spiritual disciplines will help us to be more receptive to what the Apostle Paul teaches is the more, more excellent way” - the way of love.