

Love Is Essential

During the coronavirus pandemic, there has been a lot of talk about what people and what aspects of American life are essential. Of course, in such a time as this, it is obvious anyone associated with our hospitals and other certain medical care, is essential. But what about the rest of us? Are we not essential too?

In a teaching hospital, there was a resident doctor who was known to have an especially healing effect on children. One of the nurses was assigned the duty of finding out why. It turns out that each evening this doctor would go see the children, give them a kiss, a hug, and then tuck them into bed for the night.

It seems even in light of great medical attention, a doctor who was showing simple human compassion and love, was having the greatest healing effect on some children. Of course, this should not surprise us as followers of Jesus, because we have been long told the greatest gift anyone can give to someone is love.

Our theme at University Lutheran in 2020-21 is, "Love Endures All Things". This phrase comes to us from thirteenth chapter of the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. As I mentioned in the October newsletter, this is often referred to as Paul's love chapter, and it is most often read at people's weddings.

Yet this chapter is about more than romantic love. Here Paul speaks of love as the greatest gift the Holy Spirit gives us. Paul is clear about this, saying the gift of speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy, the gift of generosity, the gift of hope, and even the gift of faith itself, are all nothing, if we do not have love in us.

Well, who has love in them? The real answer to this question is God. Our Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit have love in them. They have so much love in them it spills

from heaven itself and fills empty human hearts with a fuel that is more important than gasoline, and that is love.

In my generation, a phrase that became very popular was, "Love makes the world go around." It is a particularly nice sentiment, I think. However, it is also somewhat naïve because human love does not make the world go around. It is instead, the love of God, or actually love from God, that makes the world go around.

It's an ageless story, how the God who created all things, loved the world so much, loved the people of the world so much, that he sent his Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into the world to save it. How did Jesus save the world? First, by announcing to the world, to every last person, that God loves them.

In the Gospels, this becomes obvious when Jesus eats meals with known sinners and forgives their sins because he loves them. Or, when Jesus heals people on the Sabbath, a day where all work has been forbidden in order for people to worship God. Yet, Jesus said, compassion, caring and love are never forbidden on any day.

In this time when Jesus was in the world, he announced that God truly loves the world. In fact, Jesus said, God loves the world so much that he sent "me", his Son, into the world, so the people of the world might see what God is like, that God loves them, and then believe in God, be forgiven their sins, and have eternal life.

Yet, Jesus did so much more. He suffered humiliation and death on the cross for the sake of this love. You see, some people of Jesus day, the really powerful ones, thought the love of God that Jesus announced was not essential, and it was untrue. So, they arrested, convicted him, crucified him, and he died.

Why crucify Jesus? He was bringing too much of God's love into the world. The world believes money and power is essential. The

world believes political and religious systems are essential. Jesus made the world angry by saying all these things and more are unessential when compared to love. Love is essential.

So, Jesus died on the cross. He was buried in a tomb. Yet, God loved Jesus so much that as promised on the third day, God, the Father, breathed life back into Jesus' lifeless bones, and he was raised from the dead. Finally, the message of Jesus was shown to be true. Love is essential and it endures all things.

Indeed, love, the love of God, is essential to life on this planet. God set it up this way. Then through Jesus Christ, his death and his resurrection, we see this love endures all things. Not even death can separate God, the Father, from his Son, Jesus Christ, nor can death separate us, people, you and me, from God either.

Thankfully, nothing can separate us from the love of God. This has become even more clear to me as we have lived through these past six months of the coronavirus pandemic, and as we have lived through the harmful effects of Covid-19, which has taken the lives of over a million people in our world. We truly need God's love.

During this time, we have asked ourselves over and over again the all-important question: What is essential? Certainly, hospitals, doctors, nurses, nursing homes, and all sorts of medical care are essential. And it has been a good run for stores like Walmart and Target to be sure, as they too were deemed essential.

However, as a follower of Jesus, I believe that love, that God's love is most essential at a time like this. The kind of love that motivated a person to go to work in the nursing home every day even though people there had Covid-19. The kind of love that helped a needy neighbor, or hugged a grieving person in spite of the virus.

You see, love, God's love, will be given and received long after Covid-19 is no longer a factor in the world. In fact, it is because of God's love that one day Covid-19 will no longer be a factor in the world. That is why we can say today, unequivocally, that love endures all things – sin, sickness, evil, death and Covid-19.

Indeed, our Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, have love in them. They have so much love in them it spills from heaven itself and into human hearts. Now we have love in us too, a precious gift from God himself. It's a gift that is even more important than gasoline because it is meant to fuel the world.

Yes, love is a gift, yet it is also a fuel, a power for the common good, that God shares with us, and that God calls us to share with each other. As the resident doctor demonstrated by lovingly tucking hospitalized children into bed each night, that such love makes a healing difference even alongside of great medical care.

So, while great medical care is essential in a world facing Covid-19 and a coronavirus pandemic, so are the people of God essential. You are essential because God has given you a gift, the gift of love, to share in this world. God so loves the world, and now the Lord asks you to love the world too, through this precious gift.

As today's reading suggests, no matter what other gifts you have from God, share the gift of love God has given you. This love is your greatest gift, and it is the gift the world needs most. As I see it, all this means is we are to reach out to others in this world, in spite of the virus, and care for them in their hour of need.

God is not asking us to be unsafe, but he is asking us to love, because love is essential, and it endures all things. Even though we may not love each other perfectly as God loves us, when we, God's people, share the gift of love in the world, it is fuel and a force that can help and save a desperate world. Amen.