

I'm not going to start today with the Gospel reading for I want to mention briefly the reading from 1 Corinthians 13th chapter. The so called Hymn of Love, the passage that is often times read at wedding ceremonies. I have to share with you a story from being a counselor at Camp Nawakwa. My first summer my wife Andrea and I were co-counselors and led a weeklong camp called Foxes. I have to say that Andrea and I were just friends then, but it happened that two of us were leading this camp. We had about 10 kids and a part of "Foxes" was a three day long Appalachian Trail hike. We literary hiked tree days and camped out for two nights. For those of you who never hiked the Appalachian Trail, please do so. It's beautiful and it's peaceful, (though if you walk with ten teenagers that peacefulness becomes relative.)

One day as we were hiking we were caught in a major thunderstorm, we survived it under tarps, but of course we were all soaking wet. We had to dry our socks by the fire, we made hot chocolate to get warm, but what was interesting to see was that this experience brought our small group of campers closer together. (pause) We survived a storm together and it made us closer.

Next day we woke up into a gorgeous day, the sun was up and the birds were singing and our socks were dry and we were surrounded by breathtaking beauty of God's creation. I was sitting by the fire reading my Bible while the kids were waking up. And I was thinking to myself, this might be it. After everything we went through last night, and the group feeling closer than ever, I was thinking really hard which text I should use for the morning devotions. And as we gathered around the fire to listen and to pray, I started to read 1 Corinthians 13.

I knew there is a good chance that they have heard this text before, but this time it was different. I read the words very slowly and they were soaking in. *"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love never ends."* I didn't talk much after I read this verse. I didn't need to. But I said something along the lines: We might not see each other again, and I don't know where will life take you, and if you won't remember anything from this week at Nawakwa, please remember these words and the incredible message they convey. (pause)

You are loved by God, and his love will never end. No matter where you go, and no matter what you do, always remember that God loves you, that through this love you were created, like everything else around you, that through this love you're being saved, sustained and cared for, that through this love you're sent into the world to do nothing less than love.

I'll remember this morning for the rest of my life. For I got to share with my campers a simple and yet most powerful message of love. I'm thankful to God every time he gives me an opportunity to share this message with others. By words or by actions. (pause) And I understand that someone could say: **what is love?** Such an abstract entity. And yet we all feel it, we all experienced it at some points of our lives, we know love exists. But despite this fact, we need to be reminded of it, sometimes we need to be assured that it's here.

See there were times when God himself had to assure his people of his love. Sometimes he did it through great leaders like Abraham and Moses. Sometimes he had done it through judges and kings and sometimes through his prophets, like Jeremiah, whose calling was described in our first reading. But none of this seemed to be working. People would somehow continuously forget about his love. And so God decided to do one more thing, he decided to condense all of his unconditional love into one person. And then he sent this person to earth, to become one of us, to be with us, to walk with us, and to die for us. His name is Jesus. (pause)

And my message to you today is just a simple reminder of this love of Jesus. And if you don't remember anything from this sermon, please remember that Jesus loves you. It's such a simple message, and yet sometimes so difficult to receive, to accept and to comprehend. That's what our Gospel reading is about. Jesus said: *The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.* And then after he read these words to his fellow brothers and sisters in Nazareth his hometown he added: **Today** *this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*

This is a simple message of love for you and me. Jesus is saying what God has promised has been fulfilled for all of you, right now, today, in this very moment. God loves you. Jesus loves you. (pause) See the problem is that this message sometimes goes way over our heads. Is it because we hear it all the time? (pause)

I was in my internship and went on a retreat with all the other interns. And this speaker came to talk to us about Christian Education. And she was this wacky but very energetic young lady and she was talking to a room full of future pastors and we were all thinking: this is going to be boring. I mean what new is she going to tell us? We covered everything in classes at the seminary... (pause) and then she said: the best way to teach you this is by pretending that you're the Sunday school students and I'll be your teacher... I thought to myself, here we go... And so she prayed this awesome prayer and then talked about some stuff, I don't remember exactly what, and then as a part of her class she said to all of us: **Jesus loves you.**

You know those moments, when you're kind of zoning out, like when your pastor preaches for too long, ☺ yeah, I was kind of zoning out when she said it again: Jesus loves you. And I'm thinking yeah, yeah, I know that, I heard that, let's move on. And then she said it for the third time: Jesus loves you! And finally she started to get my attention. Where is she going with this? And then for the fourth time she looked at us and said: no seriously, know that Jesus loves you... seminary graduates on your internship who know it all. Jesus loves you. And all of the sudden I started to get goose bumps, thinking to myself, wow I haven't hear this one for a long time. (pause) A simple message, overheard, forgotten or simply ignored by so many of us.

Now I want you to concentrate for what I'm about to say is very, very important. Are you ready? **Jesus loves you.** I'll say it again: Jesus loves you. No seriously, this is not just a phrase, this is a reality. Today, Jesus... loves... you... No matter what you think, no matter where you are, no matter how unworthy you feel. Jesus loves you, *for his love is patient, his love is kind, it's not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude, it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but in the truth, and it bears all things, believes all things, hopes and endures all things. But most importantly it never ends.* Jesus loves you. It's a simple message made real and visible through our Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus says: *Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*

Let us not ignore this message for it can happen so easily. One year I ran into one of my seminary classmates at the Christian festival, and he sarcastically commented on behalf of the speaker that was just delivering his message, and he said proudly: There is nothing new in this message for me, I've heard it all, and I've seen it all. Well, he missed one important part of that message, and it was the message of Christ's love, his acceptance, his forgiveness, and his call to discipleship. (pause) By the way this friend graduated from seminary but never went into ministry.

Sometimes we come to church with the same attitude: I've seen it all, I've heard it all and we miss the point. We miss the message of Jesus. A message that is so simple and yet so incredibly powerful and life changing. God says to us today: I love you all the time. (pause) Jesus loves you all the time. Hear this message, for today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Hear this message and live it out. Accept it and spread it to people around you. Jesus loves you, now go and do likewise.

Amen