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Psalm 103 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13

Captivated by Beauty: Love & Compassion

Hear now these familiar and timeless words from the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians – words of aspiration and words of promise.

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; it keeps no record of wrongs; 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. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

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

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13 is a beloved passage – read at weddings and memorial services alike. It is a scripture familiar even to those who are not steeped in church, the kind of Bible verse that is palatable to those who would claim they are not religious at all. It speaks to hopes and dreams, wishes for the world we desire for ourselves. These words follow a long passage in 1 Corinthians 12 about spiritual gifts and the body of Christ. “Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, ... but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

This morning as we continue our *Captivated by Beauty* series, what if we see these familiar words about love through the eyes of deepening our capacity to truly be the body of Christ; of deepening our capacity for compassion. Could 1 Corinthians 13 become a lens for us to reflect on our lives – the places and moments for which we are grateful and the places and moments for which we have fallen short? Could these reflections help us deepen our relationship with God and move us to deeper compassion for others and for our self? For as our words of preparation from Theologian Wendy Farley share, “We are all bound together in the great dance of existence, nothing apart and separate.”

To develop compassion through the lens of love, people of faith often draw on introspective prayer practices like The Daily Examen, a technique described by Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius was a 16th century Catholic priest from Spain, who along with six companions formed the Society of Jesus, what we now refer to as the Jesuits. The *Spiritual Exercises* are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices developed by Ignatius to help people deepen their relationship with God. The Ignatian Spirituality website shares that “for centuries the Exercises were most commonly given as a “long retreat” of about

30 days in solitude and silence [for priests]. In recent years, there has been a renewed emphasis on the *Spiritual Exercises* as a program for laypeople.”¹

The Daily Examen has become an important part of my own spiritual life. It can be adapted for a wide variety of ages and experiences. I was first introduced to it in the context of mission trips – at the end of the day, as a group we would reflect on where we felt close to God as we were serving, and as importantly, the places where it was more challenging to connect to God. The Daily Examen asks us to slow down, and savor the walk back through our day or week, remembering not just the bullet point highlights, but the small details as well. This can be challenging for the many of us who like to get to the end result, the take home message; those of us who find ourselves to often rushing through things. I put myself squarely in that category.

I had to laugh at myself this week as I was attempting to clean out my email box before traveling and came across a New York Times article I had saved to read when I had time. It was from March 2 and titled *Why We Can't Stop Rushing*. It opened with these words: We know that happiness is to be found in taking our time and being present. How can we slow down and stop rushing our way through life?² Well apparently, I was too busy in March to slow down and read the article by Melissa Kirsch. Kirsch writes that “We rush because we’re late. We also rush because we want to move quickly away from discomfort. We rush to come up with solutions to problems that would benefit from more sustained consideration. We rush into obligations or decisions or relationships because we want things settled. Worrying is a kind of rushing: It’s uncomfortable to sit in a state of uncertainty, so we fast-forward the tape, accelerating our lives past the present moment into fearsome imagined scenarios.” Can I get amen from the other worriers in the congregation?

The Daily Examen is the antidote to this rushing – especially rushing because we are uncomfortable or uncertain. It asks us take time to become aware of God, to review our week, to focus on one feature for sustained prayer. It asks us to identify the emotions we feel as we review our week and to sit with these emotions, even if they cause us discomfort. And for those of us who are focused on what’s ahead, there is space for prayer for the upcoming week.

I invite you to join me as we engage in the Daily Examen, reflecting on your past week. The prompts will be on the screen. They are also on the bulletin insert, with some space to write or draw as you feel led. There is labyrinth on the other side of the insert, which may offer a way into the reflection. For those of you who like to know the process, we will spend 2 minutes each on the first two prompts, 3 minutes on the third prompt and 1 minute on the final prompt for a total of 8 minutes.

Let us center ourselves with a deep breath in and a deep breath out.

¹ <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/>

² Melissa Kirsch. *Why We Can't Stop Rushing*. New York Times, March 2, 2024. Available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/02/briefing/why-we-cant-stop-rushing.html>