

1 Corinthians 13 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Gift of Love

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 cymbal. **2** And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,^[a] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; **6** it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. **7** It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 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. **9** For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; **10** but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. **11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. **12** For now we see in a mirror, dimly,^[b] but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. **13** And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

When I was a child my family did not attend any church. For some reason I wanted to. Every week for several years, my parents drove me to the Unitarian church. At about 11 years old my next-door neighbor invited me to join her family at the Baptist Church which I did. After a year or so we had a homework assignment to write a description of Jesus. From my years numerous years at the Unitarian Sunday school I had formed my own clear idea of Jesus as a loving man, a teacher who taught us to love each other. I knew I wanted to be like him. I included all of this in my essay confident that I was right. The following week when my essay was returned, the teacher said I was not correct and I had to rewrite the assignment. Her suggestions on my paper were that Jesus wore sandals and a long robe, had long hair. Nothing about being a teacher or teaching us to love one another. That was my last day at the Baptist Church.

I continued to seek. As a child I thought I could simply love and I knew that was good in all people. I had no idea how difficult it would be to love everyone, those who hurt me or others, those who betrayed me.

The Greek word agape refers to brotherly love affection, goodwill, benevolence. In reading the King James version of one Corinthians, the word charity is used rather than the word love. Charity comes from the Latin word caritas, Christian love, love of humankind.

I shall speak to the new revised version of the Bible word "love" as "charity" in our modern world has taken on other shades of meaning. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians

defines Love very clearly. When trying to understand this love, I often think of a parent watching and caring for a child.

Love is patient. One day while walking in Venice, I watched a mother with her young child. The child was learning to climb stairs. He toddled up and down a small bridge over a canal. He repeated going up and down many, many times. The mother's calm observance epitomized love having patience.

Love is kind. This barely needs explanation. I have a plaque in my home that states it well for me. It is attributed to William Penn.

"If there is any kindness I can show, any good thing I can do for my fellow human beings, let me do it now and not defer or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again."

Love does not envy, is not proud, does not boast. These are often difficult for me. It is sometimes hard to do a good deed and then seal my lips. I find I still like praise. When I relate a story about something grand I have done, Jeffrey calls it a "yeah Anna story". This reminds me to remain right sized. I still struggle with remaining humble."

I think of the joy when my child surpassed me. When my children were very young I read to them. As they got older we sat on the couch one on each side of me and we read the same book. When they were about nine and 10 years old I noticed that they waited for me to finish each page. I realized they could read faster than I. From then on, they read the book together and I read it later. What joy to realize they had surpassed me. I was not envious, I was proud. This joy, I try to apply to others as well, relishing their gifts.

Love is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs. This too is a hard one for me. I'm much better than I used to be but I still can harbor and nourish a good resentment. Various times in my life I have kept a laundry list of perceived offenses and insults. I found that heavy and undermining my relationships. I work at "letting it go" and (hands past ears) "not sweating the small stuff". It gets easier and easier the more I try.

Love is not provoked. Disrespect and ill temper can be destructive to any relationship or group. Mutual courtesy and respect are essential elements in any loving relationship or community.

Unselfishness flows easily when my focus is on love. My parents displayed their unselfish love by driving me to church every Sunday, giving up their morning relaxation. Many of us know there is certainly more joy in giving than receiving.

Love rejoices in the truth. Truth, sincerity, integrity are recognizable when seen. We trust those who possess these qualities. I see trust as the path to love.

When I walked into this Meeting and began learning about Quakers all the random pieces of my beliefs begin to fit together.

As I learned and thought about our testimonies, my ideas about the good in everyone and loving all felt anchored. Our actions, our

ways of living, arise from our testimonies which for me are grounded in love.

I read a sign in and Karen Brennan's home

“Live simply that others may simply live “.

The Clarity of this was instantaneous. If I love others, I want them to live. The action was obvious: to live simply. If I live a [simple life](#) it is easier to focus on what is most important. If I strip away what is not essential, it is easier to see the truth.

I had known since my teens I was a pacifist. I could not harm or kill anyone and I could not support war as it causes death.

Embracing the concept of God within everyone clarified my belief of the good within all people and my conviction not to harm anyone. For me nonviolence is a way of living, hour by hour, day by day. I was thrilled to learn that in 1974 the Nobel peace prize was awarded to Friends as a world wide religious group.

When first asked to be clerk of this Meeting, I panicked. To learn how to clerk I went to Arthur Larrabee's workshop which, in many ways ways, made me more anxious. He was amazing, how could I ever be a good clerk? One day Ruth Bradley loaned me a book “Where should I stand, Field guide for monthly meeting clerks” by Elizabeth Boardman. In it I read

“Whether we are part of a large meeting, a small meeting, or worship group... We are engaged in the continual process of creating a living community based on love. That is Quaker faith and practice in a nutshell.”

Instead of wondering whether I could do the work adequately I just thought about how I love this community, this Meeting and its participants. Then I knew I could clerk. I would still have challenges and need to prepare, but I was clear that I love this community.

The belief that there is that of God in every person, leads directly to human equality. This came easily to me as it had been a core belief most of my life. In my childlike thinking, I thought it was easy. I have learned since becoming a Quaker that practicing equality can be challenging.

I, like many others, growing up in mostly white middle class America, have often been unaware of the many advantages I took for granted. I have observed Friends taking stands against forms of discrimination and oppression to which they had earlier been insensitive. As I continue to seek, I shall continue to reexamine my ingrained habits and attitudes.

Caring for our earth and all of its inhabitants consolidates all the actions inspired by our testimonies. At its foundation loving the environment, mankind and all the creatures has heightened my awareness of the connectedness, has helped me examine my use of all my resources. Working on the water committee in Genoa, providing healthcare for the uninsured, assisting our local ambulance and divesting some of my assets are a few of the ways I choose to use my personal resources.

What wonderful teachers I found here. I see among you many who have dedicated their time, resources and energy to create a world where love enhances peace, simplicity, equality, community, integrity and stewardship. For these I thank you.