

Counterfeit: Nice

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Prayer...

We are coming to the end of our Advent series: Counterfeit

and today we are exploring the advent (“arrival”) of **LOVE**.

And so to determine the counterfeits

we’ve been looking at the opposites of our advent themes.

The opposite of **LOVE** being...hate.

Perhaps this year, more than other years,

has been one where you’ve had experiences or stories ready

where you (or someone you know) has encountered hate.

For those who have family or friends in the States,

you may have more stories than you’d care to have.

But the question we need to ask ourselves is,

how do we typically respond

when we encounter hate?

Two of the most common responses to hate

that I’ve witnessed this last year

is 1) responding with hate

(this channels the ancient world's view

of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth).¹

If you're going to hate me,

I'll hate you back.

OR 2) we respond with niceness.

This is a classic Canadian response.

As we feel the discomfort of conflict or tension

we say whatever it takes to calm the situation

and find another topic that is

neutral enough to move forward.

This response can frequently lead to "people-pleasing"

as we don't like the idea of anyone "hating us"

(especially when we know

we're a delight to be around)

and so try and please the other person

to show them that their hate is unwarranted.

I don't think there's anyone here

who likes the idea of being hated

¹ c.f. Leviticus 24:19-20; Deuteronomy 19:16-21.

and so this is where we begin to see our counterfeit appear.

The counterfeit of **LOVE** is Niceness.

Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart (dean of St. Andrew's Hall, Vancouver)

and a friend we've had here at SPPC before

always says,

“Christianity isn't about making nice Canadians nicer.”

And yet this is frequently

how many churches in Canada treat the Christian faith.

We know the culture of Canada is to be nice

so as Canadian Christians,

we strive to be nicer than other Canadians.

When churches fall into this kind of thinking

they fall victim to pursuing the counterfeit of being Nice

rather than being **LOVING**.

But the point of Advent,

and the culminating event of Christmas,

reveals to us that we are meant for more than just being nice

(to ourselves, each other and the world).

We are invited into the depth of **LOVE**

that not only created the world around us

but reached into its depths and saved it.

Jesus is the fullest arrival of LOVE

and His followers are to reflect that LOVE

so the world might encounter JESUS in us.

And this rings true in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians

but goes beyond that

and trains the believers in Corinth

in God's *way of living* that reflects this **LOVE**

so the world might encounter JESUS in them.

1CORINTHIANS13

1 Corinthians 13 is most familiar to us

because it is stereotypically the "wedding verse."

I can't count the amount of weddings I've attended

where I've heard these verses read.

And I've been guilty of preaching these verses
at my sister's wedding.

But, contrary to common practice,

the verses of 1 Corinthians 13 that speak of LOVE

are not actually meant to outline the LOVE of marriage.

Rather, these words describe for us

the LOVE that is to be found within the Christian community.

Paul suggests that all other aspects of Christian worship

(speaking in tongues, prophecy, understanding of mysteries and
knowledge, faith that can move mountains, living out Jesus' parable
of selling everything to give to the poor),

none of it amounts to anything

if LOVE is not present.

You see the Corinthians

had been arguing over the lesser things in the Christian life;

things like, how to do baptism "properly,"

who should be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper,

and which gifts of the Spirit

are more spiritual than others.

1 Corinthians 13 has Paul critiquing these non-essential arguments

and draws Corinth's church to what truly matters:

learning to love one another,

because the LOVE that is to be found

within the Christian community

is the LOVE found in God.

In fact,

through the lens of our Call to Worship

which declared **God is Love**,²

we get a very interesting read of 1 Corinthians 13

when we swap out the word "love"

and replace it with "God":

God is patient, God is kind. God does not envy, God does not boast,

God is not proud. God doesn't dishonour others and God is not self-

seeking. God is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs.

God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. God always

² 1 John 4:16.

protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. God never fails.

In these words

we not only have a beautiful depiction of love

but we have a beautiful description of the God

who displays this LOVE in Jesus of Nazareth.

But as we work through Paul's words

we'll unpack first what LOVE is *not*

(and this is for the benefit of the Corinthians

who were resembling them)

then we'll unpack what LOVE *is*

and we'll finish off with how this relates

to the Advent ("arrival") of LOVE in Jesus.

WHATLOVEISN'T

We find in verses 4-8a

various attributes of **LOVE**.

We need to jump past a couple

in order to encounter the negative attributes

which starts with **does not envy**

literally this word indicates the idea

of setting one's heart on something

that someone else has.

LOVE does not boast

literally "to brag"

or to praise one's self excessively.

LOVE is not proud

and this word carries with it the idea of being puffed up;

there's an arrogance, a sense of superiority to this word.

LOVE does not dishonour others.

This word can also be translated as **rude**

but this is one we struggle to understand in the Western world.

The word used here suggests an act of defiance

against social and moral standards,

resulting in disgrace, embarrassment and shame.

The ancient near east

was very much a shame-based culture.

The idea of "saving face" was everything.

This is why the Pharisees and teachers of the Law
tried so hard to “trap” Jesus with scripture trivia
because if Jesus stumbled
for even a moment,
they could shame him
(they never got that opportunity).

LOVE is not self-seeking

(pretty self-explanatory)

...is not easily angered

Our family recently watched Frozen 2

and in that movie one of the characters states,

“My love is not fragile.”

When we think of the word that suggests

“easily angered” or “provoked”

I think of a fragile love.

LOVE keeps no record of wrong.

How many of us are capable of doing this?

There is one person in my life

who I’ve known to do this rather well,

and it is something that inspires me about her.

When there is a wrong committed

there is a breach in trust; the relationship needs mending.

For me, that means trust needs to be built up again

and that takes time.

It's tempting for me to allow that time to stretch out

long enough for me to get over the pain,

but ultimately it means there needs to be

a willingness to let go of the past mistake

and provide the opportunity

to make the right decision

the next time around.

My wife is the one

who is teaching me how to do this better.

Lastly for the negatives,

LOVE does not delight in evil.

The word here suggests an action that is *unjust*.

So these are all the negative traits

that **LOVE** is not

and scholars agree that these are the main traits
the Corinthians reflected most.

WHATLOVEIS

But surrounding these negative traits

are traits of what LOVE are —

so Paul is not simply calling out the flaws

but providing counters so that

they might realign with God's way.

So he declares outright:

LOVE is patient and kind.

This is patience in the face of difficulties

and this kindness is not the same as nice,

but more in the realm of an intentional act of kindness.

Then jumping down to verse 6

LOVE...rejoices with the truth.

This is a significant call for the Corinthians

who were just reprimanded in chapter 6 for

taking each other to court and would lie

in order to win the case.

LOVE always protects...

again, not something the church was doing within itself

LOVE always trusts...

very hard to do when relationships are so fractured

LOVE always hopes...

how can you hope in a greater life together

when you refuse to have anything to do with the other person?

LOVE always perseveres...

You may get burned by your brothers and sisters

if you're trying to live out this Kingdom culture

when there hasn't been a shred of it before.

Nevertheless, real love will persevere

until that Kingdom culture is solidified

and a renewed community is transformed

from the inside out.

What's striking about how Paul structures these traits

is he starts with **patience** and ends with **perseverance**.

These two, related, traits form an *inclusio*

(brackets around the bunch,
in order to draw particular focus
to what must take place in the immediate).

This broken congregation needs to learn
what it means to be Christians;
they need to relearn how to live as resurrected human beings
and that's going to take **patience** and **perseverance**
in order to see it through.

“NICENESS”

And this is where we realize
that “niceness” does not have what it takes
to bring about deep change.

The reality is,
human brokenness complicates everything.
If the result of niceness is to simply please people
then we won't actually get into
the messiness of relationship,

we'll simply try to avoid conflict all together.

This might seem preferable on the surface

but will always result in shallow relationships

that can't go any deeper.

Niceness is the counterfeit

because it deludes us into a peaceful environment

where we can grow,

but will actually be planting us

where the soil is extremely shallow

and growth will be stunted.

Or perhaps we hear Paul's words

and we become aware of our sinfulness,

and feel we can't live up to this picture of **LOVE**.

If we feel this way

I wonder if it's because we don't yet have

a clear vision of who God is.

But thanks be to God that these very verses

describe for us this very GOD!

This **LOVE** that Paul describes

is the **LOVE** that describes God (1 John 4:6-8).

And Jesus, coming in flesh and blood,

is the embodiment (the incarnation)

of that God/Love.

Paul describes Jesus for us in these verses;

Paul describes the Creator God for us in these verses.

Of course this means God's People

should reflect this image

because we reflect the very image of the One

who calls us into His Church Family.

But the point of it is

that we don't try to conjure this behaviour up ourselves

(this only leads to legalistic arrogance

when we delude ourselves into thinking

we've accomplished it).

We reflect God (we reflect this LOVE)

when we lean heavily into JESUS,

who forms and shapes us *SO THAT*

we might reflect it more and more.

God's People are to live this **LOVE**, yes,

but it is only after we have truly *encountered* that **LOVE**

who is born to us in a manger!

Only as we look to Him

will we have a clearer understanding

of what it means to live out that **LOVE** everyday.

TODAY

So the Christian faith isn't about

making nice Canadians nicer.

It's about **Jesus who is the fullest arrival of LOVE**

and as His followers lean into Him,

we will reflect that LOVE into the world!

Do not be afraid! I bring you **good news** that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a **Saviour** has been born to you; He is the **Messiah**, the **Lord**. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. — Luke 1:10-12