



Everywhere I go, I carry with me a rather lengthy to-do list (I think it runs about 12 pages this week). On that list I have an overview page for upcoming events, pages for what I hope to accomplish on each day of the week, lists related to the various ministries and programs of the church, and other things I need to keep in mind. Without that list I would be more than a bit lost.

I suspect that you have your own version of a to-do list, and it is because we are in constant need of various reminders, living as we do in a day and age that bombards us with so many requests, responsibilities, and information. We find it hard to push back against all those things that come our way, partly I think, because we live in a culture that seems to prize busyness about most other things. We like to have our calendars filled, we like to keep our families busy, we want a busy church calendar, we want busy, busy, busy! What I will talk about this morning, however, is not so much what we need *to do*, but who we need *to be*.

There are a lot of tasks on my list. There are many, many things I need to do, but interestingly, there is nothing on the list about who I should *be*. Nowhere on my list does it say to be patient, or to be kind, or any of the other qualities listed in verses 4 – 7, which we will read in a few moments. Maybe that is because we might ask, *do we really need to remind ourselves of such things?* On the other hand, we can say, with good reason I think, *in this day and age, yes, we do need to remind ourselves of who we are called to be*. Perhaps we need, besides a *to-do* list, a *to-be* list, which would remind us of all that we are called by God *to be* – people of kindness, grace, and all the other qualities that are a part of love. Precisely because we are bombarded with so many requests, responsibilities, and information, we need to pay close attention to who we are as people. Because it is easy to be carried along on the wave of all we have to do that we find we arrive, often unknowingly, at the point where we have forgotten – or forsaken – who we are called to be. I say this because, it sometimes seems to me, that we put so much before the spiritual aspect of life. Life is busy – I certainly get that – but life is so much more than simply checking off the boxes on our to-do lists. I fear, at times, that we lose who we are called *to be*, because we are so busy taking care of what we need *to do*.

Last Sunday I mentioned that I would use a different translation each week, and that I would use the King James Version this week. You will notice that I have used, instead of the King James Version, the New American Standard Version. This version is more readable in verses 4 – 7, which will be my focal point on Sunday. In the King James Version this passage is a bit awkward to read, but I will probably use the KJV at some point, just for some variety.

I Corinthians 13:1-13 NASV –

- 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*
- 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know 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 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*
- 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,*
- 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,*
- 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*
- 8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.*
- 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;*
- 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.*
- 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.*
- 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

I am going to ask three questions this morning – simple, but not easy questions.

Question #1 – Who Am I Going To Be Today?

It's been a long time since I was the age of making a vocational choice about life, but I vaguely remember all the questions and choices before me as I contemplated what I was going to do with my life. For a while I wanted to be an engineer but, as I have mentioned before, I was one of history's worst math students, which quickly ruled out a career in engineering. When engineering didn't pan out, I thought seriously about becoming a teacher. I came really, really close to becoming a teacher. In fact, for five or six years I taught a class at a school in Louisville, and was teaching the class my first few years here. I love teaching, and I loved teaching that class. One day I went to class so excited about the material I had to offer. I mean I was really excited and passionate about it. I stood in front of the class and was pouring my heart out. I just knew that material was important to those students, and I knew they would be as passionate and excited about the material as I was. I stood in front of the class and was absolutely caught up in the teaching moment. This was information that not only *could* change their lives; I was convinced it *would* change their lives! I knew they were as caught up in the material as I was and when one of the students raised their hands I knew it was to ask if they could stay longer, if I could keep teaching, and if I could offer more of those great words of wisdom, so I called on the young lady who had raised her hand and was ready to hear her say that it was life-changing material I was offering and when I said *yes, what is your question* she said, *Dr. Charlton, do we need to know this for the test or can we just forget about it?* And right then, at that moment, a part of me died. It was a harsh moment for me because I realized that education has become more about we learn in order to *do* something rather than it is learning to *be* something. Now, unfortunately, it seems education is more about what we can learn in order to get a good job rather than it is about making us better people, and if it doesn't have a practical application – such as getting us a high-paying job – then we'll mark it off as unimportant and forget about it, because we want to do, do, do, rather than be, be, be.

I must admit, however, that when I was younger I didn't realize that I spent a lot of time asking the questions about what I should *do*, but not many questions about who I should *be*. What we *do* is a vocational question; what we are to *be* is a far more existential question. One of those – what we *do* – is a question about how we make a living, while the other is about how we spend our lives in terms of who we will *be*, and they are not the same thing. People are searching for meaning and many are searching for it in their vocations, which is fine and I hope you find meaning there, but they often do not find that to be enough, because if people found enough meaning in their vocations they wouldn't be so anxious to retire, because so many people continue to look for that meaning when they retire.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John – as well as the rest of the disciples – believed they had the course of their lives set. Peter, Andrew, James, and John would spend their lives as fishermen. Matthew would spend his life as a tax collector. And then Jesus entered into each of their lives and offered them something different, and they jumped at the chance to have what he offered, because it was more than just what they were going to *do*; it was who they were going to *be*.

Question #2 – Who Is Going To Tell Me Who To Be Today?

I received an interesting voicemail the other day. My phone automatically does a text transcription of voice messages, and when I opened the text version imagine my surprise when I read the first line – *Hi, this is from the Lord*. That surprised me because generally God sends me a text message rather than calling me. But wouldn't it be a great way to get a reminder when you need one. *Dave, here's who I expect you to be today*. That would sure beat my 12-page to do list.

Very early in ministry, I preached a sermon I had titled *Who's Holding Your Cue Cards*. I don't know if I still have a copy of that sermon, but the idea of it was to draw a comparison to actors who read from cue cards and the way in which our culture gives us cues about how we should think, how we should act, and how we should treat others. In that sermon I was asking the question *who is giving us cues about how we are to live?*

It seems to me, in these contentious days, that we must be very conscious of the fact that we might be taking our cues about who to be and how to act from the larger culture in very many ways. And if we are, that should, at times, grieve us, as we have moved into an era of such division and contentiousness. I think we are all, at times, wondering *what is happening to us?* We have entered into a time in history that I would call *the great unraveling*, where everything seems to be unraveling around us. I would add that not all of it is negative, certainly, but much of what is happening is an unraveling of culture that reminds us that we do not know how to deal with our differences, so we are anxious and it seems people take out that anxiety upon one another. For my part, however, I will not reject, diminish, and certainly not hate someone who is different from me. I will not reject, diminish, and certainly not hate someone whose politics are different from mine. I will not reject, diminish, and certainly not hate someone whose religious beliefs are different from mine. I will not reject, diminish, and certainly not hate someone whose ethnicity is different from mine. I will not reject, diminish, and certainly not hate someone whose sexual orientation is different from mine. I will not reject, diminish, and certainly not hate someone whose economic, educational, or social status is different from mine. But I will say to those leaders – whether political or religious – who encourage me or anyone else to do so that I will neither listen to you nor do what you say. Our cue card is in this Bible, where we are taught that every person is a precious creation of God and we are to love them, however much we might be alike or different. Our cue card is Jesus, who tells us to love our enemies, and if we love them they are only our enemies by their choosing, not by ours. Anything that tells us otherwise is a false cue card and we ought to tear it up and cast it out of our lives! And if you disagree with everything I've said this morning, I still love you.

Division was part of the struggle of the Corinthian church, to whom Paul wrote these words. The church in the city of Corinth was a microcosm of our society today, as they were very fractured and awash in conflict. They were divided into their own camps, reflecting what Paul wrote to them in I

Corinthians 3:4, where he said that some of them followed after Apollos, and some after Paul, and some after Jesus. Each person chose their own camp, their own tribe, which is what we see in our society today, and there is an ever-growing divide between those camps and we wonder if there is any way to bridge those divides. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about love because he understood it was the solution to the problems in their church, and at the root of their problems was the failure to remember who they were called to be. Living in a time not unlike our own, in terms of the divisive and contentious nature of society, Paul called the Corinthians to a different way of living – he called them to think not just of what they would *do*, but who they would *be*. In our own fractious age, we would do well to hear and apply the words of Paul in this chapter, words that make for a very good *to-be* list.

Question #3 – How do we get to be who we are called to be?

It's nice of Paul to give us the answer to that question. It's right in verse 4 – 8 –

4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,

5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,

6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails

That's a very good prescription for becoming the people we need to be, I believe, but we must keep at it, we cannot give up. I was in a small church recently, where our band had been asked to play. The church reflects the decline of the neighborhood around them, as it has obviously been in a state of decline for some time. I would imagine that at its peak, back in the 50s, 60s, and into the 70s, the congregation probably numbered around a hundred or so; now it is a few families, numbering just a handful. It's hard to see churches in that condition, but it was inspiring as well, because those who remain there are working very hard in the ministry of that church. There is one person, in particular, who was obviously the heart and soul of the congregation and who was keeping things going. I imagine there are times when she feels like giving up, and if she had given up, the church would probably have closed. In spite of the odds against that church, she keeps pushing the congregation and inspiring the congregation. I was very impressed by her commitment and her perseverance. After we were finished, and were loading our gear, I talked with her son, who helped me carry my equipment to my car. He told me of how hard his mom worked in that church and how she had brought him back to church, and at one point said *I guess that might be the wrong reason to come to church, because of another person*. I told him that no, it was a great reason to come to church because of her. It's a great reason because that's how faith and the church reach others. Faith and the church reach others through our relationships, and that's exactly how Jesus meant it to happen. When he chose the disciples he reminded them that they were to connect with others relationally in order to bring others to him. He told Peter and Andrew that he would make them *fishers of men* (Matthew 4:19), which means they were to use their relationships to reach others.

Sometimes faith seems like a fool's game. Sometimes we feel like quitting. Sometimes we feel like giving up. I wondered, as I stood in that struggling church in Louisville, if anyone had ever asked that group of people *why don't you quit? Why don't you give up?*

I know you sometimes are discouraged; I am too, but keep going. We are called to *do* ministry work, but we are mostly called to *be* who God has created us and called us to *be*. That means success is not predicated upon what we do, but upon who we are. *Be* who God has called you to *be*, and trust God that what needs to be done, will indeed get done.