

St. Andrew's Sermons
The Rev. John D. Rohrs
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I'm sure you saw the story a few weeks ago about the people who were stuck on I-95 for so long. Among them were Casey and John Holihan, the couple from Maryland who called the phone number on the back of a bakery truck sitting in front of them. I think they hadn't eaten in like 30 hours, so they called and left a message and after a while the owner of Schmidt's Baking Company called back and gave them and the driver permission to hand out every loaf of bread in the truck to the surrounding cars.

It was a beautiful story – sort of a modern-day loaves and fishes – but honestly what struck me most was how much attention it got. That story was in every newspaper and on every news show for days afterward, and it made me think how hungry we are for acts of kindness. They shouldn't be such an anomaly but I guess it seems that way. Most stories we hear are about gun violence or school board fights or partisan battles. We're weary of the pandemic and we're weary of division; I don't remember a time when empathy was in such short supply. No wonder the Holihans seem like superheroes.

Love is patient, Paul says. Love is kind. Love bears all things, endures all things. Love never ends. It sounds idyllic, like a hallmark card. But sometimes I wish Paul had been a little more realistic. What if he had said, "Love is hard. Love is full of false-starts and second chances. Love is exhausting and heart-breaking and complicated." Let's face it; it's hard to love strangers when your own needs are pressing. It's hard to love your neighbors when your world views are light years apart. It's hard to love your enemies when they've done you harm. Heck, it's even hard to love your family and friends sometimes; they always know how to poke you in just the right spot.

Love is hard, and we can blame Jesus for that – he set an impossible standard for us to follow. He loved friends and enemies, outcasts and insiders. He loved fishermen and housewives. He loved tax collectors and Roman soldiers. He loved beggars and immigrants and politicians. He loved everybody, and that boundless love nearly got

him thrown off a cliff in today's gospel story. Did you catch that? He had the gall to say that God's dream applied to everyone, not just the people of Israel. Basically, he told them that God was bigger than they thought, and people often find that a threatening message.

Jesus set an impossible standard, but it IS our standard. It's our call to follow Christ on that path of love. It is at once the most difficult and most important practice of the Christian life. Nothing else comes close, according to Paul. Faith to move mountains, knowledge of all mysteries, the power of the prophets – all nothing, Paul says, without love. Love is the highest value and priority. It is the source of all we believe and all that we do.

So we are called to love freely, to love with patience and kindness and all the rest. But what exactly does that mean in practice? We know what to do next time we're stuck behind a bakery truck, but what about our daily lives? I think the best we can do is to look at how Jesus loved. He always noticed people who others ignored – the lepers, the immigrants, the man at the side of the pool. And he believed in people who others decried – the woman at the well, the tax collector, the criminal at his side. Jesus' love was not just patient and kind, it was expansive, always pointing toward a specific vision – the vision he preached from Isaiah's scroll last week: good news for the poor, release to the captives, liberation for the oppressed. That's what love looked like for Jesus.

I think what he wants us to release is that we are all captives, we're all imprisoned, until the world looks like that dream. The only way to free ourselves is to love as Jesus loved. Most of the time we fall short. But we keep trying, trusting in God to multiply our acts of kindness, like so many loaves and fishes. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now we see only in part, but then we will know fully, even as we are fully known. And faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. Amen.