

Date Preached

30-Jan-2022

Date Initiated

11-Jan-2022

Where Preached

SAK

Appointed Readings

Epi 4, Yr C

" [Love] *bears* all things ... *believes* all things ... *hopes* all things ... *endures* all things. "



[A] They'd been neighbors for more than a decade now. When Leslie moved in, Blair came over as soon as the moving truck pulled up and started unpacking boxes right alongside Leslie ... and they'd been in and out of each other's houses almost every day ever since. But lately, their friendship had grown a bit strained: as if it was unraveling in slow-motion. Blair was leading a grassroots campaign in opposition to some town initiatives that Leslie strongly supported. Now when they met, there were more gaps in the conversation; more petty disagreements; more private, unspoken wonderings about why ... and when ... the *other* had changed so much. One afternoon, over coffee that neither of them drank, Leslie suggested, tentatively, that maybe they should see less of each other ... that maybe they'd grown out of (or past) their friendship.

Leslie expected Blair to agree, in relief, so they could drift apart and stop stressing one another. Instead, Blair turned to Leslie, lightly touched Leslie's forearm and said, "You know what, Les? Our friendship means too much to me to let it die. I know you bitterly disagree with some of the things I'm doing in town. And while I'm committed to them, I'm also committed to *you*. Let's put on our coats and take a walk. I'm not going to say a whole lot. I just want you to tell me—*candidly*—all the ways what I'm doing hurts or upsets you. Let's *engage* our differences, rather than pretend they don't exist: Tell me, as your good friend, how I'm disappointing you."

Love **bears** all. [pause]

[B] They were at an impasse. In this small parish, any task force was bound to be small; and, in fact, Jamie and Alex *were* the task force. It was their job to propose a resolution for a pragmatically-small-but-emotionally-fraught disagreement that had arisen—seemingly out of nowhere—among the parishioners over the last few months: one of those issues that appears minor on the surface, but under which lurk layers of divergent values and perspectives. But after weeks of talking about it ... evaluating various options ... weighing plus-es and minus-es ... they'd made precious little progress. While their own personal opinions weren't too dissimilar, they knew they hadn't come up with anything likely to un-ruffle the parish's collective feathers.

And then, Jamie turned to Alex. "You know," Jamie said, "I think we're going about this the wrong way. We're trying to solve a problem by thinking up ways our members—by themselves—can compromise or placate. But what we're *not* doing is including the One who brings and holds all of us together. Maybe our job isn't to point folks to a solution, but to a Source: God. Maybe we've been tapped not to *solve* our dilemma but *reframe* it: as an opportunity for the whole parish to come together in prayer; to quiet our voices and open our hearts; to let the Holy Spirit guide us—*all* of us—to an outcome no one's even thought of." ¶ "Hey, I think you've got a point," Alex replied. "We've been trying to get this behind us so we can all 'get *back* to Jesus.' But He's walking this road right alongside us ... and waiting for us to follow *His* lead."

Love **believes** all. [pause]

[C] At first, the questions seemed innocuous and endearing. Over time, they'd grown more insistent—maybe a little annoying. And now, Kelly and Robin agreed, they'd become oppressive. Ever since they'd begun telling people about their engagement a few months ago, everyone wanted to know where they were going to live ... could they earn enough to support themselves ... did they plan to have children; and—a two-parter, here!—if they did, would one of them stay home ... which of their churches would they attend ... had they known each other long enough; or well enough ... what if it turned out one of them enjoyed doing the dishes or sex or even *being married* less than the other? When Robin and Kelly didn't have a fully-composed answer at-the-ready, they often got a sigh and a head-shake—"dreamers!"—or a knowing tilt-of-the-head and a wan smile that telegraphed, "*You'll see!*"

Now, Kelly and Robin weren't *unwilling* to countenance these things; and, deep down, they knew they'd run into their share of the adversities that beset every married couple. But all these persistent, practical questions seemed to elide the joy that was the wellspring of their love: For in one another, they saw an image—an expression—of Christ: the Christ Whom they wanted in their lives. They felt in their attraction a bond not of human affection alone, but also of God's promise and providence. The relationship they looked forward to was not a series of practicalities to be negotiated and managed ... but a sacred intertwining of journeys to the Eternal and to Eternity. This was the marriage they envisioned. All those questions? He'd help them answer them, ↓ when they needed to.

Love **hopes** all. [pause]

[D] Finally home, Marty sat—collapsed, is more accurate—on the sofa, drained and disappointed. "It's always the same—always a mess," Marty moaned. "Am I a fool to keep going back?" As Pat's child, Marty knew Pat's own childhood had been difficult ... wondered whether Pat, who hadn't seen a doctor in years, might be mentally unhealthy ... even allowed as how Pat might simply *enjoy* always being so angry and mean. Whatever the reason—or reasons—Marty's every interaction with Pat ended in sorrow and frustration.

But if one reality about Marty-and-Pat was Pat's ugly demeanor, another was Marty's being the only other person in Pat's life. Marty's family, never very close to begin with, had all drifted (or stormed) away from Pat. Pat had divorced decades ago, and Marty was the only one of Pat's five kids who ever visited or even called. Pat had no friends, no colleagues ... not even a neighbor. To Marty's knowledge, the one and only flesh-and-bone human being Pat interacted with these days was Marty, and Marty could tell ... from the shadow of a smile that skittered across Pat's face when Pat opened the front door ... from the way Pat always sat next to, rather than across from, Marty as they sipped their obligatory Snapples ... Marty could tell that Pat *needed* Marty: somehow inwardly joyed in Marty's presence, even if Pat's outward 'tells' were cutting and cruel. And so, as Marty sat there on the sofa back at home, out came the calendar, ready to record the next time Marty would visit Pat, *again*.

Love **endures** all.

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"Love is a verb, not a noun." It's a statement no less true for being a trendy aphorism. But I think St Paul got there first: Bears. Believes. Hopes. Endures. Love is *four* verbs ... indeed, a whole *spectrum* of verbs ... and every single one of them says, "Christ."



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