

“What’s Love Got to Do with It?”

Romans 13:8-14
September 10th, 2023
Sermon notes from the pulpit of
First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois
Matt Matthews

Romans 13:8-14 8We owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

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The sermon title this week gives a nod to Tina Turner. She had a hit song by that title. (*“What’s love got to do, got to do with it? What’s love but a secondhand emotion?”*) She was the oldest woman at that point ever to score a Billboard number one hit.^[1] She was 44.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that love fulfills all law. Jesus would say love is singularly the most important law. What’s the greatest commandment? *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength—this is the greatest commandment. The second is like the first. Love your neighbor as you love yourself.*

Let me be clear. Jesus is NOT saying that “Love is the answer.” Love is NOT the answer.

Jesus is saying “Loving is the answer.” The practice of love is the answer. Putting the ideas and ideals of love into gear is the answer. Walking the walk is the answer. Reaching out with kindness, hospitality, welcome, attentiveness, joy, and care is the answer. Loving God, neighbor, and self is the answer.

Talking about love, believing in love, singing worship songs about love—this is not the answer. Actual, rubber-hits-the-road love is the answer. Listening to one another, serving one another, welcoming one another, being gentle with one another, encouraging one another. Practicing these things is love.

Paul puts a fine point on it. In the 12th chapter of his letter to the church at Rome he told us what love is. He painted a picture of what love looks like (**Romans 12:9-21**):

⁹Let love be genuine;
hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;
love one another with mutual affection;
outdo one another in showing honor.
Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.
Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.
Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.
Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;
do not claim to be wiser than you are.
Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”
No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.”
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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Eboo Patel spoke at the university a few years ago. In his new book (*We Need to Build*), he writes about the city of Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which fire departments are manned by different religious communities. When the Muslim home is burning, the Catholic fire department does not respond.^[ii]

That's not what happens here in this country. Our firefighters respond to all calls. But sometimes I worry that we are becoming more divided as a people. When we hold our own views tighter and tighter, we have less and less strength to hold on to each other.

Could it be that the places in which we are most divided are the very places we need to pour our most ardent love? How did Paul put it? *Extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*

We build community by being community.

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This has been a week of upsets, of changes. There are many things to which we must adjust.

The baptism which was scheduled for today needs to be rescheduled. This baptism has been cancelled twice. In each case, members of the family got sick. In this case it's a case of covid. So, baby Violet, Mom Kate and Dad Bill are recovering at home. We'll eventually have a baptism. We are eager to gather around this font of water with them.

Today, we should be in our sanctuary upstairs, but on Sunday morning, the elevator broke.

On Sunday evening, Bill Mitchell died. I would rather be looking at him upstairs, in worship, on his regular pew. Now he is here mightily in spirit. We hold Pat in our prayers.

We are recovering from hurricanes and fires. Battle lines are recklessly being drawn for various upcoming elections. Our children are having a hard time catching up with the classes they missed in pandemic. Many of them are experiencing what it feels like to be left behind. Some of the people we love are slowing down. Many of us are grieving losses or staring down anxious uncertainty. *Our son is getting married!*

Changes. Some good. Some, a little scary.

How are we going to get through it?

We are going to love each other. We are going to love the world. We are going to find tangible ways to put God's love into action.

What's love got to do with it?

Everything.

^[1] **What's Love Got to Do with It** is a song written by [Graham Lyle](#) and [Terry Britten](#), and recorded by American singer [Tina Turner](#) for her fifth [studio album](#), *Private Dancer* (1984). [Capitol Records](#) released it as a [single](#) from *Private Dancer* in May 1984 and it eventually became Turner's biggest-selling single.

Although Turner had already scored a late-1983 [top 30](#) hit with her rendition of [Al Green's](#) "[Let's Stay Together](#)", "What's Love Got to Do with It" became her first and only [Billboard Hot 100](#) number-one single, selling over 2,000,000 copies worldwide. At the time, aged 44, Turner became the oldest solo female artist to top the Hot 100. It was the [second-biggest single of 1984 in the United States](#) and the 17th-biggest in the United Kingdom, where it peaked at number three on the [UK Singles Chart](#). "What's Love Got to Do with It" received three awards at the [27th Annual Grammy Awards](#): [Record of the Year](#), [Song of the Year](#), and [Best Female Pop Vocal Performance](#). In 1993, the song's title was used as the title for the [biographical film based on Turner's life](#).

In 2012, "What's Love Got to Do with It" was inducted into the [Grammy Hall of Fame](#), marking Turner's third Grammy Hall of Fame award.^[3] The song ranked number 309 on [Rolling Stone's](#) list of the "[500 Greatest Songs of All Time](#)" and at number 134 in their 2021 updated list.^[4] It also ranked number 38 on [RIAA's](#) "[Songs of the Century](#)" list. Several musical artists have [covered](#) "What's Love Got to Do with It" and experienced commercial success with their renditions. American rapper [Warren G](#) released a [hip hop](#) version in 1996, and in July 2020, Norwegian DJ and producer [Kygo](#) released a [remix](#) of the song.

^[5] P. 5 Presbyterian Outlook, Sept 2023, "Hospitality with a moral punch" by Teri McDowell Ott.