

A Better Way
1 Corinthians 13:1-8
February 15, 2015
Rev. Alida Ward

When you've been standing in the same pulpit for 25-plus years, sharing stories, your congregation gets to know a lot of things about you, for good or ill.

And that's because over 25 years, you share an awful lot of stories about yourself.

And when you've been sharing stories for 25 years, inevitably some stories come round again more than once.

So here's a story that I strongly suspect some of you have heard before in some form, one which tells you a good bit about me, for good or ill.

You know, I think, that something I love to do is to try to fix things.

If you were here in December, you may recall that I showed the kids my favoritest book,

a wonderful little manual called 'Dare to Repair', which -- for good or ill - has helped empower me to attempt fixing all kinds of things. I shared with the kids my recent success in dismantling and reassembling a toilet -- they seemed less impressed than I had hoped, and slightly grossed out, as did most of you.

Since then, I can tell you, I got our automatic garage door opening again --

I stood at the kitchen window pressing the button over and over just to watch it go up and down and up and down.

One of my best fix-it accomplishments, until it wasn't, dates back a decade ago, to my single mom days, when I decided to save the church money by *not* calling the cable guy to our home. There was at the time just one cable hook-up in the family room, for one TV, and I wanted to put a couple more TVs upstairs in the bedrooms.

I'm trying to remember now why I thought a TV in my kids' room was a good idea ...

Well, anyway,

So, I went to Radio Shack and bought miles of cable wire,

and a variety of useful looking things to link stuff together.

And this is what I did:

I went down in the basement and put a line splitter on the one line we had, and I attached a cable wire and I -- this is where it gets brilliant --

I drilled a hole in the heating vent and ran the wire up through the heating vent into Brigitta's room.

Then I wanted TV in my room too, so I split off another cable and ran it up into the attic somehow, and across the rafters,

and then through a hole I drilled in my bedroom ceiling.

I actually had to drill four holes in the bedroom ceiling, 'cause I had a little trouble hitting the right spot.

When all I was said and done, I had three TVs running off the one outside line -- and just to be clear, this was before you had to rent your cable boxes, so I wasn't cheating.

It was all pretty awesome, and it worked, my tangle of wires, until it stopped working.

No signal on any TV.

And I was then forced to do what I hate to do, as David will attest: ask for help.

The Cablevision truck pulled up, and in came Mr. Repair Guy, and I led him to the basement.

For a good while, he just stood there, gaping at the sight.

That's where I ran the line through the duct, I said, trying to be helpful.

"I see that," he said.

"And this one goes up to the attic," I said.

"Got it," he said.

And then he said the words I've never forgotten.

"You're really dangerous," he said, "'cause you know just enough to really get yourself in trouble."

So that was a little embarrassing.

But then he took mercy on me.

Look, he said, let me show you how to make this work, he said.
And got out his tools, and a much better signal splitter than I'd used,
and better cable wire than what I'd bought.
Let me show you a better way to do this, he said.
And we worked on it until the wires were untangled
and the crooked made straight
and I'd learned a better way.

I think about him every summer, actually, when we do the Appalachia trip.
I travel around from work site to work site,
and one of the great joys I have is watching our adults working with the kids,
teaching, coaching, helping untangle whatever needs untangling,
showing them better ways to do things.

Last summer, I worked a day with Jeff Dixon, Ellen Swan's son,
who's a professional carpenter.

He spent the whole day teaching.

'Let me show you a better way to hold that saw,' he'd say, gently, when he saw a
catastrophe in the making.

"Here," he'd say to some looking puzzled, "let me show you an easier way to measure
that."

And to a frustrated kid, he'd say, "You know what, there's a great trick for drilling those
wood screws straight.

Let me show you, let me show you a better way."

Whether it's the cable guy showing you how to run wires right,
or a workcamp leader with a better way to tighten wood screws,
or a coach who gets out on the field with you,
or a teacher who sits down with you to work the problem,
or a boss who takes the time to walk you through it,
our lives are full of moments when someone shows us a better way.
Shows us a better way,
and we are the better for it.

That's all the apostle Paul was trying to do for the church in Corinth.
That passage *Henry/Jackson* read for you,

that beautiful passage, *Love is patient, love is kind,*
that was Paul trying to help folks get things straightened out,
untangle the wires,
do things easier, do things right.

Teach them, coach them.

[Henry/Jackson] read you chapter 13 of the letter to the Corinthians,
but you need the backstory from chapter 12.

In chapter 12 Paul was trying to get these guys to understand how a church is
supposed to work,

how a group of people are supposed to be.

Because these Christians in the Corinth church, they'd been getting all tangled up in
who was better than the other,

and snapping at each other all the time.

Being hateful and nasty and bitter and trying to one-up the other.

And Paul says 'first of all, you're *all* important, so cut the one-upmanship.'

And then he says this. Last verse of chapter 12.

He says "Let me show you a better way.

Let me show you a better way."

Like a repairman straightening out the wires,
like a carpenter showing you to cut a straight line,
like a teacher showing you how that math problem works,
"Let me show you a better way," says Paul.

And the better way? -- the better way is **Love**.

Listen up, says Paul.

You can be the most eloquent person there is,

you can speak with the tongue of an angel,

but if you don't have love, it's not going to work.

You can talk about your faith moving mountains,

you can give away everything you own to the poor,

if you don't have Love, none of this is going to work.

Love is the better way.

Love is the way that things get untangled,
Love is the way that the crooked is made straight,
Love is the way that the problems are solved.
Let me show you the better way, says Paul.
Listen up.

Love is patient, and kind, said Paul.
Love doesn't pass judgment, or put people down.

We use 1st Corinthians 13 in weddings so frequently that, to be honest,
I often have couples tell me they don't want to use it just because all their friends used
it.

And I get that -- they've all seen *The Wedding Crashers*, where Owen Wilson and
Vince Vaughan sit in wedding after wedding placing bets on when someone will get up
and start reading 'Love is patient, love is kind' .

But as I always tell my couples,
this is not a passage that we should ever stop reading --
this is worth retelling, again and again.
This is who are called to be, not only in partnership, not only in family,
but in church and community,
as Christians, as a people, as a world.

This is the better way.
Love is the better way.

On this Valentine's weekend of 2015,
is there really any message that we need more?
That Love is the better way?

Listen again to what Paul tells his friends,
as he tries to straighten them out:
"Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends."

This is the better way.

Our world needs the better way.

Think of the tangled mess I created when left to my own devices --
think how much I needed someone to straighten things out,
show me a better way to do it.

Are we not, our world, one heck of a tangled mess?

Left to our own devices, we've turned out to have just enough knowledge to be
dangerous,
and to get it all wrong.

We need a way to straighten things out.

We need a better way to do things.

Well, we have it, said Paul to *his* tangled-up community.

Love is the better way, he said.

I have been thinking, in this hard and wintry week,
about four people, four young people, whom God gave us to show us that love is the
better way.

I have been seeing the face of Kayla Mueller -- and the faces of the three beautiful
young students in North Carolina: Deah, Yusor, and Razan,
All of these, all four of these, should be carried in our hearts,
because each of them, each in their own way,
was seeking to show that Love is the better way.
Each, young as they were, had already set out to show us that Love is the better way.

Deah and his wife Yusor, and her young sister Razan,
each weekend cooked meals for the homeless in Raleigh;
all three were traveling this summer to Turkey,
to bring medical care to refugees,
something Deah and Yusor, at ages 23 and 21, had already done several times.

"*They are at peace*" Deah's family said this week,

"now it is for us to live in their legacy,
to share the good that we learned from them."
"Live with love, with mercy and with peace."

Live the better way, they were telling us.
Live the better way.

As Kayla Mueller did.

Kayla wrote this, when she had just turned 23:

"I will always seek God.

Some people find God in church.

Some people find God in nature. I find God in suffering.

I've known for some time what my life's work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering."

And so she sought God in the hurting:

she volunteered at a camp for young African refugees in Israel,

she went on a humanitarian mission to Guatemala;

in India, she taught English to Tibetan refugees and to poor women and children,

and she was drawn, powerfully drawn, to the plight of Syrian refugees.

From Turkey, where she went to work in a refugee camp,

just as Deah and Yuzor had,

Kayla wrote "as long as I live, I will not let this suffering be considered normal."

A few days ago, I printed out a copy of the handwritten letter Kayla wrote to her family from captivity, to read and re-read it.

"By God and by your prayers," she wrote, "I have felt tenderly cradled even in freefall.

I have been shown in darkness, light,

and have learned that even in prison, one can be free.

I am grateful.

I have come to see that there is good in every situation.

Do not fear for me."

Kayla, I learned yesterday, taught her captors how to make doves of peace from scraps of paper.

Love was her way.

Love the better way.

If you added all their years of life together, these four,
you would not reach one hundred.

Too soon in heaven, too soon with God.

But not too soon to have shown a world
what lives lived the better way look like.

Love bears all things,

believes all things,

hopes all things,

endures all things.

And Love, the better way,

Love never ends. Amen.