

**Love, the better way**  
**1 Corinthians 12:31- 13:13**  
**Feb. 4, 2018**

If you had wandered into the Barn last Sunday afternoon,  
and seen what I was doing,  
my guess is that you would have seriously questioned  
my sanity,  
or at least wondered what exactly you pay me to do.

I was sitting on the floor,  
on a plastic tarp, with large bags of rice around me,  
and also bags of balloons.  
And with a plastic funnel I was attempting to pour rice into balloons.  
Rice, needless to say, was all over the floor of the Barn.

To give some context to this:

I was not alone.

There were a number of teenagers with me,  
all, with equal lack of success,  
attempting to get rice into balloons.

To give even more context:

what we were trying to do was to make stress balls.

You know, those balls that you're supposed to squeeze whenever you're feeling a little  
tense,

to get that nervous energy out.

Those teens are on a town committee with me,

for the Fairfield Cares Coalition,

a bunch of good people who are hard at work trying to keep our young people substance  
free -- and, to do that, trying to keep them more stress free.

And yesterday we had a Wellness Fair,

where we had guided meditation and yoga --

and, stress balls for everyone to take home.

Which is what we were trying to make last Sunday.

Because we'd heard that you could save money and make your own with balloons and  
rice.

So there we were.

Popping balloons, spilling rice, laughing hysterically, and failing miserably.

Until someone said "there has got to be a better way to do this,"  
and someone else said, "let's YouTube it."

Sure enough. There's a YouTube video on how to make stress balls out of balloons and rice,

and we gathered around my phone and peered at it  
and, yes, there was a better way.

It involved soda bottles and I can explain later, but the upshot is we filled a bin with stress balls in no time,  
and saved ourselves a lot of stress.

There is a YouTube video for every moment like that.

Every time you say "there has GOT to be a better way," I assure you, someone has already YouTubed it.

Here are the things that I have searched on YouTube of late.

It's an eclectic list.

The best way to get rid of skunks under the front porch -- which worked except now he's at the back porch.

How to make an Opera Cake -- step by step video instructions for David's favorite chocolate concoction.

The way you should store dahlia bulbs for the winter.

Oh, and, how to keep squirrels from climbing up your bird feeder -- this was definitely the best way.

Grease up the pole with Crisco.

I had so much fun watching squirrels slide down the pole that I actually posted my own video of it.

Okay, squirrels and chocolate cake, where am I going with this.

The point is that we are all, always, looking for a better way.

YouTube's an easy place to find that better way,

but we also have friends we call when we need a better way,  
parents who weigh in with advice on the better way;

growing up we had coaches who were all about trying to show us the better way to do it.

How-to books and exercise programs and diets --

all to show us the better way to be, to do, to get things done, to live.

What Seth read to you just a few minutes ago  
was a passage from a letter.

A letter written two thousand years ago by a follower of Christ named Paul,  
who was all about trying to help people find the better way.

Paul was something of a coach, I guess you'd say.  
He was an advice-giver to other Christians,  
a mentor for people starting up churches, back when Christianity was barely even a thing, it was so brand-new.  
And in chapter 12 of this long letter he wrote to the Christians in Corinth,  
Paul was trying to get these guys to understand how a church works best, how a group of people work best together.  
Because, truth be told, these Christians in the Corinth church, they'd been doing a lousy job with that --  
they were getting all tangled up in figuring out who was more important than whom in the church,  
infighting and snapping at each other.  
And Paul says, in chapter 12,  
"hey, first of all, you're all equal in God's eyes, so enough with the status-seeking stuff."  
And then he says this. Last verse of chapter 12, first verse Seth read to you.  
He says:  
Let me show you a better way.  
Let me show you a *better* way.

Like a guy on YouTube with a how-to video.  
"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,  
but 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 fixed,  
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.

Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.  
It does not insist on its own way.  
Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things.

And you have to hope that his friends in Corinth sat up and paid attention to that, looked at each other and said  
"yeah, he's right, that really *would* be a better way to be."  
And hugged each other and got their act together.

Love is the better way.  
Something we believe here at Greenfield Hill Church,  
something we take seriously,  
something we try to live every day.  
Love, the better way to do -- well, everything.

That's why I love what our Compassion group has done.  
They've announced that this month at Greenfield Hill Church is February Love Month.  
A way to remind ourselves every single day  
that Love is the better way.  
You probably already noticed -- they put a calendar in the bulletin this morning with something to do every single day to remind yourself that Love is the better way.  
No YouTube video needed -- our Compassion Group is showing us the way, with a way of loving every single day.  
Pay for a stranger's coffee.  
Visit a nursing home.  
Let someone go ahead of you in line.  
Turn off your phone and really listen to someone.  
Reach out to an old friend.  
Love is the better way.

And honestly, is there any message that we need more right now?  
Love is the better way.

You heard me just a minute ago share a prayer concern for someone dear to me and to David,  
and dear to everyone in this church who has traveled with me to India.  
John Mark was our partner in mission,  
the leader of our work in India.  
And because his loss is earth-shattering to us,

David and I will be leaving tonight for India,  
to be present at his memorial service,  
and to carry the love of many who are here.  
The last time I was in the pulpit, just three weeks ago,  
I spoke to you about him:  
I spoke about the joy with which John Mark lived,  
'santosham' is the word in Telugu.  
I spoke about the depth of faith that shone from him,  
and brought light into so many people's darkness.

I said earlier that we all have teachers in our lives who try to show us the better way,  
coaches who want us to learn the better way.  
John Mark was one who showed me the better way,  
because he had long since figured out that Love was the only way.  
He lived the truth of Paul's words,  
that love is patient and kind,  
that love does not insist on its own way,  
but bears all things and believes all things.  
And so David and I will go back to the other side of the world  
to honor one who, as a church friend here put it,  
is now himself *consumed by love in the eternal arms of God*.

We are, all of us, constantly seeking the better way.  
The better way to live, to be, to do.  
The better way to believe, to know, to achieve.  
There **is** a better way.

Love that bears all things,  
believes all things,  
hopes all things,  
endures all things.  
Love is the better way.  
And love – love never ends.  
Amen.