

Sunday, February 13 | Journey Worship Service

TEXT: [1 Corinthians 13:1–8a](#)

THEME: Life Work

TITLE: Enduring Love and Loving Resistance

By Kathryn Ophardt

I told myself that I wasn't going to give a Valentine's Day sermon, but here we are, and I am. But it's not because of the commercialized holiday, it's because I think we all need to rest in the love of God more often.

To be honest, roses, balloons, and giant heart themed stuffed animals were not how I grew up with Valentine's Day. Growing up, Valentine's Day was a family holiday. It was a day to tell each other how much we loved each other. It was a day to remember the story of Saint Valentine.

It has come to my attention that not everyone spent Valentine's Day talking about its namesake, so I would like to share it with you now. Saint Valentine was a priest in 3rd century Rome. This is still part of the era of Christian persecution in the Roman Empire. Valentine got in trouble for performing marriages under Emperor Claudius II's reign, who outlawed weddings. He was put in jail for this, but Valentine continued to spread love and affirm love in others while he was incarcerated. He befriended his jailer, Asterious, and his daughter, Julia. Valentine was offered pardon if he renounced his Christian faith. When he refused, he was sentenced to death. Legend has it that he wrote a final letter to Julia encouraging her to stay strong in her faith and spread the love of Jesus wherever she goes, signing the letter "From your Valentine." This is the story that inspired the tradition of sending valentines to one another.

Based on this story, valentines don't need to be about sappy romance. The original valentine was a letter of resistance, of fearless and enduring love. It's a love that is alive in us through Christ and is meant to be shared. It is a love that persists in hopelessness, loneliness, or pain. And there seems to be a lot of that right now in the world around us.

Just about everyone I have talked to for the past few days and weeks have told me that they are tired. Whether it's because you're tired of work or school, or tired of kids testing your patience, or just tired in general, our community is full of tired people. There are a lot of good reasons to be tired. The pandemic alone is enough to make a person tired—tired of the hyper-vigilance, the isolation, the endless decisions that make going to the movie theater or restaurant a question of public health. We are exhausted, but the demands on our time, work, and attention are the same, if not more than before the pandemic. This is a natural reason to be tired.

But we keep on keeping on. We persist. We endure. And this point of exhausted endurance is where the scripture meets us. This is where love meets us and offers to hold us up. The scripture says, Love bears all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. The truth is that we do not bear life's challenges alone. As I meditated on St. Valentine's story, I thought of his testimony to God's love with him in jail, and the parallels I see as we send valentines to people in the detention center outside of

Pittsburgh. Like Valentine who was unjustly criminalized, undocumented immigrants are being criminalized for moving across land that none of us can claim as our own. Crossing a border without documents is a misdemeanor, yet our government treats it like a felony to make an example of them and deter people from immigrating here. The empire has taken a different name, but it's still an empire. The valentines are passed to different hands, but the radical love endures.

Many of the people in the detention center are native Spanish speakers, so one of the messages that Casa San Jose recommended writing on the valentines was, "el amor no reconoce fronteras ni muros" which means, "love knows no borders nor walls." As I wrote this Spanish sentence on a valentine, I thought about how specific it is to say "amor." In Spanish, there are several different words for love, but "amor" is the strongest, most complete form of love. It is the self-giving love of a parent to a child. It is the love of Psalm 23, that God promises will follow us all the days of our lives. It is the love that Jesus uses when Jesus says "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34). This is the kind of radical love that knows no boundaries nor walls. "El Amor" is a love that cannot be contained. This is St. Valentine's testimony as his message of love transcended the boundaries of the jail. His ministry of radical love persisted despite the persecution he faced. The valentines we sent to the detention center also profess that our love for one another, and God's love for us transcend the boundaries of borders and of walls, of broken policies, and unjust systems! The radical love of God fills us, surrounds us, empowers us, and sustains us! It is through the love of God that we can find solidarity with one another! God's love transcends the boundaries and the walls that our society has built up, and holds us together in God's loving embrace.

In love, we resist. In love, we persist. In love we endure! And we do not endure alone, because love endures with us, which means that God endures with us because God is love! This quote comes from a different letter, the first letter of John. This big theological statement opens up so much of scripture. In fact, to say that God is love opens up so much of life! If we say that every time we experience love, we encounter God, and every time we share love, we follow God, then suddenly our life becomes filled with God's divine presence! I can get so focused on all the pain and suffering, and lose sight of God's loving and enduring presence. Because even as hard times may seem endless, they will pass away. Yet, our scripture today proclaims that Love will never end! This does not invalidate the pain that you or your neighbor feels, but it can give us hope that the pain—whether it stings like xenophobia or racism or poverty or any other dehumanizing circumstance, it does not get the last word. Love never comes to an end, and God is Love.

So as we endure and resist together, I leave you with this valentine:

God is patient; God is kind; God is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. God does not insist on God's own way; God is not irritable or resentful; God does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in truth. God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. God never comes to an end. And this Loving

God is with you now.

All glory be to God. Amen.