

We Are Asbury (4): United by Christ's love for each of us
1 Corinthians 12:12-14 / 1 Corinthians 13

ChatGPT

We have been reflecting on the meaning of our mission statement to know who we are as Asbury UMC and what it means to be a church. Today, we will continue to reflect on the meaning of the mission statement: united by Christ's love for each of us.

During the week, I read an interesting article. Josh Franklin, the Rabbi of the Jewish Center of the Hamptons, delivered a sermon. He began the sermon by saying, "I am going to plagiarize a sermon and read someone else's sermon and you have to tell who wrote it." Then, he continued his well-written sermon about Joseph forgiving his brothers and vulnerability. Some people even clapped while listening to the sermon. After the first part of the sermon finished, he asked the congregants, "tell me who wrote it." People made various guesses such as other local rabbis, Franklin's father, and even Jonathan Sacks, the most revered Rabbi of our time. Can you guess who wrote the sermon? [ppt] "ChatGPT!" an advanced chatbot that can mimic human conversation. It has recently become very popular. Have you ever heard of it? Maybe not. In short, Artificial Intelligence wrote the sermon. Amazing! Isn't it? So I asked ChatGPT to write a poem for Asbury UMC and this is what it wrote.

Asbury UMC, a place of peace,
Where love and grace forever increase.
A haven for the weary soul,
A place to be made whole.

With open doors and hearts aglow,
All are welcome, don't you know?
A community of faith and friends,
Where love and kindness never end.

A sanctuary for the broken-hearted,
Where hope is always freshly restarted.
A place to find redemption and peace,
Where all are welcomed, no matter their beliefs.

So let us come together, hand in hand,
At Asbury UMC, our spiritual homeland.
Where we lift our voices in praise and song,
And our hearts are filled with joy all day long.

What do you think? Quite impressive. I feel this AI could write an English poem much better than I could. If technology keeps improving, maybe, you will see an influential AI preacher in the future. If there is a perfect AI preacher who can do inspiring preaching every week, would you like to attend that church? Why? Why not? I believe all of you would prefer to stay in Asbury even if your pastor preaches with his broken English in his Korean-Rhode Islander accent because the church is more than good sermons.

Love

What is it that makes you want to be Asburians? Loving people. That's what AI cannot replace. The church is a gathering of people. We are called out by God and become a new family in Christ's love. That's who we are. We are different from one another but we are united by Christ's love for each of us to become one body of Christ.

Apostle Paul said, "Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives... Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained on one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink." (vs 12-13)

We are one body and what binds different parts of the body is the Holy Spirit who enables us to love one another. As we all know, the church in Corinth was a bad church. Many churches are named after biblical places or churches, but have you seen a church named, "Corinthian church?" Never. We can easily assume how bad the church in Corinth was.

The church was divided and competed with one another. Some church members sued other church members. Some engaged in immoral behaviors and even misused communion. In short, it was a terrible church to belong to. They had received amazing spiritual gifts from God, but they misused them to promote their own status against others. So, Paul reminded them of what was really important, Love!

1 Corinthians 13 is known as the "Love Chapter." In this chapter, Paul writes about the importance of love in our lives as Christians. He says, " Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

Love is a balm that heals a broken relationship. Love is not just a feeling, but a character and way we treat and relate to one another. Love is what unites the church. Some people have asked me, "if Christians believe in the same God, why are there so many different denominations?" why? Because we have a right doctrine but no love. During the religious reformation period, Catholics and protestants, each of them, claimed to have right doctrines so they argued and fought against one another onto death. That is the root cause of religious war and we know how it ended. Christians killed fellow Christians in the name of God. What was missing was love.

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs." Winning an argument is not important but loving one another is a key for the church. Claiming a right thing is important, but what's more important is to love those who have different views. Sadly, love is missing in our beloved United Methodist Church. As we all know, the UMC has been divided between the UMC and the Global Methodist Church because of different understandings of human sexuality. Both sides proposed compelling arguments and claimed their position to be true. Both sides tried to win votes in the General Conference and control power. What is missing? Love. In our pursuit of justice or a right doctrine, we've lost love. In love, being right or wrong is less important. In fact, if we lose love, we become a noisy gong.

"If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing." (v 1-3)

What we need is love. A few years ago right before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, we had a courageous conversation about the issue of human sexuality. Do you remember? We only had one meeting because of the pandemic, but it was a good meeting. Many of you attended and honestly shared your opinions. Regardless of your positions, I asked you to empathetically listen to others' voices. I also asked that we try to stay together as a church regardless of the outcome of the General Conference. For us, love was the guiding principle of our conversation and we came to a better understanding of each other, though we didn't reach to an agreement. I am sure that was possible because of love in our church and I'm glad that Asbury is a church that is full of love. I believe you have experienced love in our church at some point of your life.

With your prayers, love and care, I have recovered from Covid-19. It was harder than I expected. Some people experience mild symptoms but Juhee and I did not. We struggled with high fever, body aches, chills, sore throat, runny nose, and losing taste and smell. It's not fun, but I have learned two things from it. First, an ordinary day is a blessing. Just not being sick is an extraordinary blessing. Second, I am very much loved by Asbury UMC. Many of you prayed and cared for me and Juhee. Thank you! And not only me, but you also will receive many prayers and support from our Asbury family when you are going through a difficult time. We celebrate together, and laugh together because of love. We mourn together and share burdens together because of love. We are truly a loving church family because of the love we share. This love comes from our Christ and that love unites us. We are Asbury! United by Christ's love for each of us. That's who we are. So far, we have loved well. We don't know what's tomorrow will bring, but just remember this love and cherish it. We will be o.k. My Asbury family. I love you! Let this love continue to bind us together. Amen.