

"And now I will show you the most excellent way." I Cor. 12:31b

I have started writing this several times only to hit the delete button. My mind is going in too many directions. There is the tragedy of ebola and our irrational fears. There is the tragic school shooting in Marysville and the senseless loss of young lives. There is the election where half truths are presented as truth and truth is distorted to make a point against an opponent. It is raining and the wind is blowing.

Then there is the factor of fear. Fear is commodity of the day - fear of immigration reform, fear of ebola, fear of your neighbor who is strange, fear of anything that is different from what we know. Politicians are betting that we will vote for them if they can evoke the fear factor. They want us to fear what might happen should their opponent get elected. Fear - not the Halloween scary kind but fear about a future in which they are not in control. Fear of what will happen if _____. (You can fill in the blank. Almost any fear will do.) Be afraid be really afraid.

And then, I read Paul's little sentence in I Corinthians. There is another way: *The most excellent way*. God's way - the way of love. A way that never fails. A way that is not filled with fear but with hope, forgiveness and grace. A way that changed the world forever and called a people to be the people of love. A way that is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud or self-seeking, is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs. A love that does not delight in evil (or lies) but rejoices in the truth. A love that always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. A love that is lost in many congregations as sermons are preached against other cultures, peoples, races, etc. I will love you only if you become like me seems to be the norm. Not a love that says I will love you in the most excellent way, the way of Christ.

The type of love that Paul writes about is not rational. It goes against everything. It means that I have to love those who are not all the lovable. It means that I have to go the extra mile with my neighbor or with a stranger. It means that I have to listen and learn another culture. It means that I have to look for the best in others. It means that I have to be like Christ! It means that I stand against injustice in any form. It means that I will be misunderstood as Christ was misunderstood. It means that my love for Christ and his message is greater than any thing the world has to offer - and with him I stand.

It means that I am going to have to love you when you get angry and grumble against me and do not love me back. It means that I still stand with you and beside you even though we do not agree on many things. It means that love has to overcome hate, prejudices and misunderstandings. It means that I must find a way that we can work and walk together and if you don't come beside then I must go alone. It means that love must prevail - it is the most excellent way. It is the way of Christ. It means that I cannot use fear in our relationship. And, that I need to listen not judge.

This is the month of Thanksgiving. The month we are called to remember and give thanks for all that God has done and all that God is doing. We are to be thankful for a harvest that most of us did not participate in. We are to be thankful for families that are dysfunctional at best. We are thankful for a Church that is not perfect but is working out its own salvation with fear and trembling. We are thankful that God so loved the world, that Christ so loved the world that they demonstrated for us, *the most excellent way*.

I am an American Baptist by choice. I am a part of Evergreen by choice. We are not perfect - we disagree on many issues. Some support one issue while others don't - but for the most part we have found a way to be together in mission and outreach. We have found a way to sit in worship and lift up the cause of Christ with thanksgiving and praise. We have found a way, the most excellent, to do our business and give everyone a voice (well, at least Evergreen has and the ABC/USA is working on it). We have tried not to use fear but love as the foundation of our being. We can laugh and cry together. We can stand together as one in Christ - maybe not quite agreeing but understanding our differences and rejoicing in a God who loves us even when we don't agree. We listen to all the voices and do a lot hugging - We understand that God's call is different on all of us except for the most excellent of ways: *"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."*