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1st Corinthians 13:3–13 from The Message Translation, edited for brevity.

If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't strut,

Doesn't have a swelled head,

Love trusts God always,

Love never looks back,

But keeps going to the end.

Love never dies.

We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all as clearly as God sees us! But for right now, we have three things to do: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

The Gospel of Luke, English Standard Version 1:43-45

⁴³ *And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*

⁴⁴ *For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."*

Driving in the fog on Christmas Eve.

Recently, in my job as a chaplain at Boulder Community Health, the hospital in

Boulder, the fiancé of a critically ill patient told me the most beautiful metaphor I

have ever heard. She was talking about her fiancé, who was lying between us in

an ICU bed, on a ventilator breathing for him, a balloon pump assisting his heart, and drugs called pressers keeping his blood pressure high enough to move oxygen through his body. His heart had stopped. She had been there when it happened, and she started CPR and called 911. We'll call this woman Claire and the man Jason. She was in her mid-twenties and so was Jason. Claire proved to be a very strong, very caring, and very courageous young woman. The man Claire was scheduled to marry had been in the ICU for about ten days and his prognosis was very uncertain. It was unknown if his heart would recover. They didn't know what his neurologic condition was; there was some chance that Jason had suffered a brain injury because he had gone without oxygen until the EMTs got his heart restarted. But she was sitting by his side, holding his hand, repeating to me what the doctors had told her - that his recovery would be a long journey. Claire said that her love for Jason would get her through. Then she told me that Jason had helped her learn to drive in bad weather, and she told me the story. Let's first pause and look at our first reading for today.

It's from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Corinth was a bustling, fast-paced, port city that sat on a small piece of land that connected the main portion of Greece to a peninsula called Peloponnesus. It was a place filled with cultural activities and advanced employment opportunities, as well as crime. In

many ways, Corinth was much like America is today. About the time this letter was written, and although Paul and the people of Corinth didn't know it, the city was nearing the end of its glory days. In this letter, Paul was trying to get the believers of Corinth, who gathered together in a number of small house churches, to understand that they must follow the ways of Christ, not the worldly ways of human beings. In our passage, Paul is telling them that although there are many characteristics of a faithful person, the most important Christian quality is love. Here is our passage, compressed a bit differently than we just heard:

If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.

Love trusts God always,

Never looks back,

But keeps going to the end.

Love never dies.

We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing God directly just as God knows us! Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

Let's get back to Claire and Jason. Claire told me that she had always been a very nervous driver, and that since she was from a place that rarely had bad weather, snow and rain and most of all, fog, frightened her. One day, she and Jason had been out for a long highway drive, going to visit family. It was a cold

morning and suddenly, she drove into a huge, dense fogbank. The fog was so thick, she couldn't see at all. She began to panic and said that she should pull over and let Jason drive. But Jason told her to just keep driving – slowly. Don't worry about whatever is a mile ahead of you or even ten car lengths ahead of you. Just be calm and only look forward a little at a time. Just look far enough ahead to not get in an accident. That's what she did, proceeding little by little in the fog and trying not to think about what might be further ahead than she could see. Gradually she relaxed, and they drove on slowly. Then, suddenly, they emerged from the fogbank and they could see far ahead of them.

That's what Paul is saying in this passage. We have to peer through the fog, trust God, be patient, and know that we will eventually emerge. Paul is talking about a spiritual fog, a time when we feel lost and troubled. We need to just proceed little by little and know that God will get us through, and that when we emerge, we will see the bright sun and we will be wrapped in God's love. That is what Claire told me she was doing in that ICU room - not looking ahead to the day when Jason left the hospital or could go back to work or go back home. She was just looking ahead one day at a time, being with him, holding his hand and talking to him, and knowing that one day, they would both emerge from the fog. It would be just like the way Jason taught her to drive in the fog.

We have been in a dense fog for a number of months now. With the corona virus, we've been anxious and apprehensive. But love is indeed what is most important. The love that we have for each other is simply a reflection of that powerful and protective love that God has for us. Our second passage, from the Gospel of Luke are words spoken by the mother of Jesus:

⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Mary has gone through some very troubled times. She had been very frightened, knowing that she was pregnant. But then the angel Gabriel came and spoke with her, telling her that she would give birth to Christ. And now, she is joyful. She has broken through the fog, having never lost her trust in God's love. The child of God is about to be born and she is the mother. What a message to get from God.

We have made it partly through the fog, far enough to see Christmas. We will make it the rest of the way, and we will do it little by little, by holding God's love close to us. The pandemic will end - and we will see a brilliant light.

Claire was with Jason every day, and it was a very long journey. But they came out of the fog and he eventually walked out of that hospital. Jason was going to need therapy, but Claire and Jason were going to live a joyful life. Amen.