Right now, we seem to be living in a time of radical crisis. Our old way of being in the world doesn’t work anymore. Everything has changed. Even our daily lives are very different from what they have been and what we have expected them to be. We no longer seem to know what “normal is.”

We are called to rise above our limitations. As Christians, we are called to respond in this time in a particular way. We are called to love. Love is what we are about as Christians. When a crisis comes, however, we often panic and become anxious. That anxiety often leads to us being crabby and inward-focused. We forget about the needs of each other in community. We forget about the needs of our neighbors. We fail to love.

Yet, love is the way to respond to a radical crisis. Love is essential always, but in a crisis, it’s critical. The whole Bible shows and tells us this.

Let’s look at today’s three lections, each of which talks about love and each of which represented a time of radical crisis in the lives of the people. In Exodus, the people are in slavery, and God is going to free them – quite an earthshaking event for those who haven’t known anything else. So that Pharoah will let the people go, God is going to kill the firstborn children, but he will spare the firstborn of the Israelites if they put lamb’s blood on the door. Amid all God’s instructions about how hurriedly they are to eat the lamb is the comment that small households should share a lamb with their neighbors. Amid all these instructions, God also talks about how they will celebrate this feast of God’s deliverance as a community forever. They will celebrate in joy and love together for generations.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, the Roman church and community were in a radical crisis as well. The church was already struggling with living together as community when some of them were Jewish Christians and others Gentile Christians. Their whole cultures were different and these differences made for some disagreements. If these two factions didn’t get together, the church in Rome would fail. Failure would have been sad for them, but also for us because our church history has stemmed from that church in Rome.

In Matthew, we have a template for love and reconciliation when grievances arise between members of the church. The passage understands that we must speak our grievances in love (not carry them around with us and build resentment). The phrase “making someone as a Gentile to you” isn’t aimed at excommunicating someone just to be mean. Instead, it’s about distancing yourself from someone who potentially can destroy all the cohesiveness of the community while still loving that individual and praying for him. It’s about distancing yourself so that they have time to think about what they are doing and to change. The distancing, then, is about love.

We face several crises now. Coronavirus. Racial unrest. Economic uncertainty. Income inequality. Uncertainty and anxiety about the church and how it has changed or is changing or will change. We face life-changing crises, just like the Egyptians and Israelites. Just like the Romans. Just like the Early Church. How do we respond?

The following may sound familiar to you, although it’s translated into more colloquial language.

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don’t love, I’m nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

**2**If I speak God’s Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, “Jump,” and it jumps, but I don’t love, I’m nothing.

**3-7**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 want what it doesn’t have.  
Love doesn’t strut,  
Doesn’t have a swelled head,  
Doesn’t force itself on others,  
Isn’t always “me first,”  
Doesn’t fly off the handle,  
Doesn’t keep score of the sins of others,  
Doesn’t revel when others grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
Puts up with anything,  
Trusts God always,  
Always looks for the best,  
Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.

**8-10**Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

**11**When I was an infant at my mother’s breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

**12**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 him directly just as he knows us!

**13**But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

In all these crises and amid all the change that goes with them, we band together. We show compassion to one another. We put the needs of neighbors and community above our own. [[1]](#footnote-1)

We love.

1. 1 Corinthians 13 in the Message translation, copyright 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson [↑](#footnote-ref-1)