If you have attended at least a few weddings in your life time, there’s a good chance you heard the passage from 1 Corinthians this morning at one of those weddings. “Love is patient; love is kind.” I’m guessing it is the most common Scripture passage chosen for wedding ceremonies, and for good reason. It is a beautiful passage: hopeful and inspiring words for nurturing a loving, lasting relationship. Yet, this morning these words confront us. They challenge us to reflect on the broader application of these words to how we live all of life.

To understand the challenge, by way of contrast, let’s start with the simple: love is patient, love is kind. I saw a great post on Facebook this week. Wait, you might be saying to yourself, Jeanne is finally on Facebook?! No, a friend simply showed me the post, from Gen. Colin Powell. It’s a good one to share. Recently, Powell was driving to Walter Reed Military Hospital for an exam when his left front tire blew out. He describes himself as a car guy. He knew he could change the tire. He got out, jacked up the car and began removing the bolts. It was cold outside and the bolts were tight. After he removed several of the bolts, a car pulled up in front of him. A man got out of the car and Powell could see he had an artificial leg. The man said he recognized Powell and wanted to help him. Powell learned that he had lost his leg in Afghanistan while he was working there as a civilian employee. The man grabbed the lug wrench and finished the job as Powell put the tools away. Then, they both headed off to appointments at Walter Reed. Later that day, the man sent a message to Powell telling him what an inspiration he has been as a military leader and statesman. And, Powell’s reply back was how this man had touched his soul and reminded him about what this country is all about and why it is so great. Powell wrote, “Let’s
stop screaming at each other. Let’s just take care of each other. You made my day.” It’s a good story, a nice reminder. “Love is patient; love is kind.” We understand, we care for one another.

We understand, so much so that perhaps we roll right over some of the words in this passage. How about this morning we let these words confront us? “Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.” These are harder words to live out because they strike at the core of our humanity. Who among us hasn’t ever assumed the worse in someone instead of assuming the best? Who among us hasn’t dismissed someone because of their behaviors or views instead of figuring out a solution or finding common ground? Who among us hasn’t jumped to a conclusion about someone based on past experience, or even hearsay, instead of trying to understand the current issue or circumstance? Why do we act this way? Because we’re human, because our feelings get hurt. We feel misunderstood or undervalued or unappreciated or ignored or neglected or unloved. And we act out. So, how do we live out the call to love fully? We seek inspiration.

It is worthwhile to go back to former President Barack Obama’s eulogy for Sen. John McCain: a eulogy from a leader of the Democratic Party for a leader of the Republican Party. The message is so much broader than our politics. At McCain’s funeral at the National Cathedral, Obama began his eulogy by talking about McCain calling him earlier in the year to ask him to give a eulogy at his funeral. Obama said, “Most of all, it showed a largeness of spirit, an ability to see past differences in search of common ground. And in fact, on the surface, John and I could not have been more different. We’re of different generations. I came from a broken home and never knew my father. John was the son of one of America’s most distinguished military families. I have reputation for keeping cool. John, not so much. We were standard-bearers of
different American political traditions, and throughout my presidency John never hesitated to tell me when he thought I was screwing up.” Obama continued, “John was a pretty conservative guy. Trust me. I was on the receiving end of some of those votes. But he did understand that some principles transcend politics. Some values transcend party…John understood that our security and our influence was won not just by our military might, not just by our wealth, not just by our ability to bend others to our will but from our capacity to inspire others with our adherence to a set of universal values. Like rule of law and human rights, and insistence on the God-given dignity of every human being.” Obama said about his relationship with McCain, “We laughed with each other, and we learned from each other…We never doubted we were on the same team…That’s perhaps how we honor him best, by recognizing there are some things bigger than party or ambition or money or fame or power, that there are some things that are worth risking everything for. Principles that are eternal. Truths that are abiding.” As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, love does not insist on its own way. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. We need each other to get to the whole truth.

Love gives meaning to all of life. Love is the driving force of life. Love is the end game. Loving is how we are meant to live in this world, inspiring all our beliefs and behaviors. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, in his recently published book *The Power of Love*, writes: “There’s a certain sense in which when you are loved, and you know it, when someone cares for you, and you know it, when you love and you show it—it actually feels right.” He continues, “There is something right about it. And there’s a reason for it. The reason has to do with the source. We were made by a power of love, and our lives were meant—and are meant—to be lived in that love. That’s why we are here” (pg. 8). It actually feels right. And, we can feel that rightness in every aspect of our lives – not only in our volunteer activities serving others, but in
our work and play and school and activities, even in running errands and doing chores – in every relationship, in every interaction. Curry says, “God wants you to live. God wants us to live. God wants this world to live” (p. 43). We are fully alive when we are loving. Loving is not always easy. We’re human. Acting out from a place of hurt is part of our repertoire. It just is. But, Christ is always offering us new life…every day…which means we can, once again, open our hearts to God’s love, which “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Amen.