

Walking Bass and Syncopated Wine

I Corinthians 13:13 (Faith, hope, and love abide, and the greatest is love.)

Proverbs 9:5-6 (Wisdom invites us to eat bread, drink wine, and walk with insight.)

Love, love, love. Love is what Jesus taught. Love is how Christians are supposed to be known. “They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love. They will know we are Christians by our love.”

“Faith, hope, and love abide . . . and the greatest of these is love.”

Love, love, love. Paul compares the virtue of love to other virtues. Prophecy was an alternate favorite virtue of Paul, but Paul knew that prophecy was for a given community at a particular time... it is limited. Faith and hope are made possible by God’s grace... yet it seemed strange to think of God as having faith or hope. God does love, thought Paul, and so do people. Love is what ties our being to God’s very self. We are united in Love, that truly never ends, yet can always be made wider and deeper. Love, love, love.

I was struck by X Vandersoll’s comments that I read, and since discovered that Rev. Van. was the chaplain at Yale when Karen Gardner was there... He wrote a brief article in a devotional journal in which he presented this musical analogy that seems appropriate on Choir Recognition Sunday. He said that love is the “walking bass” of the Christian life. “Love just keeps thumping along, marking the rhythm of all that’s good in human life, walking through hell and high water, not stupidly denying the destruction inherent in either, but walking on . . .”¹

Bill, would you show us a “walking bass”?

Love, love, love, the walking bass of Christian life. Love is the rhythm to which we walk, on which we journey.

We greet others warmly. Love, love, love. We pray for others. Love, love, love. We give money—even to those whom we do not know—out of love, love, love, for those not only next door, but around the world.

We tell our children, love, love, love.

Yet, sometimes this straightforward message is a drum beat, a “walking bass,” and it’s not fully developed, not full somehow.

In the musical analogy, the walking bass is not all there is. It cannot be, for life is just not so simple as to have a “walking bass” component all by itself.

There is more. We can point to the Old Testament view of Wisdom that calls us and invites us to taste Love’s syncopated wine, *to risk the complexities of Love*.

Bill, would you show us some “syncopation” on top of the walking bass?

Thump, thump, thump. . . Love your neighbor as God loves us, thump, thump, thump. Love *does* have a walking bass component.

However, if we really go deep into love or let our love be wide, we reach many conundrums that require Wisdom. Love how? Love how much? Love whom? Who is your neighbor? How do you balance love for all your neighbors and all your family and yourself? How do we integrate everyone’s values and views of the world?

I hardly ever read an Advice Column, but for some reason I was drawn to an article in the Daily Facts, and I was appalled at the advice, in fact, I wished I had not been drawn to the column to read it at all.. I pondered why I cared about the advice, why I reacted so strongly. My answer, way too early the next morning, was a realization that I did not think that the advice writer had faced the complexity of the question... the answer seemed pat, something that might be a general guideline, actually a guideline from two

centuries ago—not a response to a person who was genuinely hurting over that precise internalized guideline....

It dawned on me that if we live with general guidelines, platitudes, even sometimes things we think are absolutely true, then we are very tempted to want to apply those—regardless, regardless of real people who are hurting because of them....

In other words, if we are aiming toward Wise Love, we *will be* frustrated many times; we will be wrong many times about people. Because, if we are aiming toward Wise Love we will be forced to deal with complexity—more complexity than perhaps we want to deal with....

When I was 17 years old I was told something about a relative that I had not known, and I wrote a typical teen-ager-like poem, but I still remember it, for it was a conclusion I had come to after the world had suddenly become more complex: Life holds so many secrets, it's impossible to know, what makes up a person's past, what makes a person grow.

That was my way of coping with a reality that had just transformed, a certainty that had come undone.

Sometimes the more certain we are, the more we need to be very careful that we may be only living by the thump, thump, thump walking base, and we're not adding the full dimension of love—that includes the complication and beauty of syncopated wine....

We will face over and over again situations in this complex, computer, diverse, space-aged world that are not spelled out in the Bible. So, we are forced, whether we feel like it or not, to interpret, to apply Wisdom to Love.

Is it more loving to name boundaries in a relationship or to be available at all times in all ways? Love, love, love. It's not so easy—life requires Wisdom. With Wisdom, we'll find that the answer of boundaries in relationships varies—what relationships, what ages, what history, what future?

Is it more loving to send money, to feed people, to teach people to farm, to start a community garden, to ...? Love, love, love. It's not so easy—a complex life requires Wisdom. With Wisdom we'll realize the answer varies—sometimes money IS what is needed, other times an inner city garden, other times a job, or education....all of the above.

Is it more loving to learn with open hearts from Muslims about the Islamic faith or to “give them Christ”? Love, love, love. Sometimes “leading someone to Christ” is precisely our being so filled with Christ's love that we are all ears, all heart, and not mouth—that we hear another all the way to understanding them!

Is it more loving to tell the absolute and full truth about our feelings toward someone, or our opinions, or to “keep the peace” at the risk of some lack of full disclosure? Love, love, love. Wisdom required. What is the nature of the relationship? Are we selling the other short, thinking they cannot accept our full selves? Are we naively expecting way too much of another to bear our souls? Syncopated Wine, Wisdom, ambiguity....

It's hard enough as individuals in our relationships... with close friends, family, neighbors, interfaith dialogue, political venues, larger church discussions... All agree, love, love, love, but that's not the whole composition.. can't be.... syncopation

It is not enough to have the bass part. We need all the music of love. The syncopated beautiful elements make the love we actually live out more like the love Jesus taught. Love all; love when it is difficult; and love those you do not love. Impossible?

Perhaps it is possible to live out the fullness of Love, its walking bass and its syncopated complexities, if we drink, really drink in the Wisdom of Christ, the Wine of God's grace. When we know deep inside that we are loved, we are more likely to see what God sees in all others, and what Wisdom can do when we think we have reached a cul-de-sac in our loving.

Love, love, love; that's not all there is. We are called to be the recipients and the bearers of Christ's syncopated wine—Love that risks love, love that is “deep” and “wide.”

Is everyone saved? Burning issue some decades/centuries.. Wesley, by time of old age.. yes, grace of god truly for all, no matter what religion/faith.. Now, seems many of the most hotly debated concerns regarding people in our culture do not focus on whether people are Christians, but regardless of their Christianity, are we/they deeply okay?

I've been amused by all the cultural dialogue on empathy, since as a Pastoral Counseling professor for 21 years, that was the most repeated topic I taught.. or tried to teach.. so many people, seminary students, thought it would be so simple.. listen to someone.. sometimes they thought it meant saying yes, uh huh... others did sort of grasp another's point of view, one very different from their own, but they were quite unskilled in communicating that point of view aloud, to enable the one speaking to KNOW they were heard....

It's great if judges and politicians from all ethnic backgrounds, male and female have empathy—it's sort of required of us Christians... if we are going to live full composition of life.. including the syncopated wine parts...

Never boring, can't be a Christian today as we were last year, because times keep changing, have to keep grasping new viewpoints, new situations that didn't exist before. It's sometimes like trying to find something on a cell phone when you're over 35—just keep pushing buttons till you find it.....

In playing, the old man was changed utterly, transformed from a stooped body with a hesitant gait to a vigorous athlete who addressed the keyboard with a boundless urgency. He was not sitting *at* the piano, he was indivisible from it, his hands and feet striking the keys and pedals with a potent, sinuous force. The piano, too, was transformed. . . . He became part of that endlessly subtle, witty, and insistent conversation that is music.” P.

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¹ John W. Vannorsdall, *Weavings XXII*: 3, p. 16-17.