1 Corinthians 12:27-13:8
Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.
If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.
Love is patient; love is kind; 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. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

Romans 12:3-18
For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.
Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.
Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

“I Ain’t Dancin’”
Gregg Dawson
October 23, 2011

"Everybody's crazy except me and thee, and sometimes I wonder about thee." During my childhood I often heard this saying from both my mother and my grandmother. I heard it so much that I thought it was one of the most common American sayings. I haven't heard it much since I left home. My grandmother's family were Quakers during the 1800s, so

maybe this is an old Quaker saying that just hung on through the generations of my family. Everybody's crazy except me and thee, and sometimes I wonder about thee. This is of course a humorous recognition of what we all know to be true, that people think differently. I often find that people think differently than I do.

My wife Karen and I took a week off in August and went to San Francisco on vacation. We had a wonderful time, we saw all the sights. We had to take a shuttle from the airport to our hotel. Our driver was a Russian immigrant. It think his name was Sergai. It was just Sergai and Karen and I in the van, no other passengers. As we took off, Sergai told us that this was his first week on the job. He said he was really glad to have the job, that his wife had had a job for a while, but that it had taken him a long time to learn enough English to get a job. We got out onto the interstate that leads into the city, and Sergai began to drive like a lunatic, going way too fast as he swerved from lane to lane, tailgating some cars, cutting others off, and while he was driving like this, he was talking the whole time. He told us that he learned to drive race cars when he was a teenager in Moscow. He loved to drive. He said he had let his son sit on his lap when his son was two years old, and drive. He told us that the USSR was a great country, but that Russia had been ruined when the USSR disintegrated, that in the USSR everyone had a place to live and health care and a job, but now, Russia was becoming just like the United States. Now, you just don't expect to find your life in the hands of an unrepentant Communist race car driver from the old Soviet days. Karen and I were becoming more and more alarmed. I thought maybe he had come here to get revenge on us, one horrifying accident at a time. We were sitting in the seats just behind the driver's seat, with me in the middle, and at one point I leaned up forward next to him and I said, "You know, we're really not in that big of a hurry." It didn't help. People think differently.

The summer before last I was driving to Great Falls, Montana, to visit my mother. I decided to stop for gas at a convenience store in White Sulpher Springs, Montana. The store seems to be the gathering point for the town, and after I filled up with gas, I decided to go in and get myself a Nutty Buddy. So I'm standing in line to pay for my Nutty Buddy and a fellow comes in the door, a young man, and he greets the fellow that's next behind me in line, and he says to this fellow, "What are you up to?" This guy who was wearing kind of a muscle shirt said, "I'm going up to Great Falls today to get a new tattoo." And the first guy says "What are you gonna get?" and the guy with the muscles, as he demonstrated on his muscles, said, "Well, on this shoulder, I'm going to get a bow hunter with the arrow drawn, ready to shoot, and on this shoulder I'm going to get a big bull elk. And under this picture it's going to read, "Go big" and under this picture, "or go home."

Now, you know what I was thinking. "Hey, that's what I was gonna do." Perhaps not. As I continued my drive I thought a lot about this guy, what he was trying to communicate. Perhaps, most positively, "Do your best." Perhaps, not so positively, "Take all that you can get." Perhaps it was as simple as, "Shoot big animals." What I knew for sure was that that fellow and I sure think differently. I'm not talking about the tattoos as such, here. Some people like them, some people don't. I'm content to let people make their own decision, except for my kids, whom I've forbidden from doing that. But anyway, that fellow and I think so differently, because I'm not sure there is anything that I want to say

enough that I'm willing to have it permanently etched across my body, and let other people look at it. I'm just way too shy for that. I remember when I was in the 10th grade, my world history teacher, who directed the school plays, asked me one day to be a dancer in the play. I went to a rehearsal and we practiced one scene that I would appear in. What was required of me was to portray an Egyptian slave, and wearing a breech cloth and no shirt, kneel on one knee and let a girl step up on my knee while I held her steady. I was not the moose of a man that you see before you today. I was a pretty skinny kid, and there was no way in the world that I was going to appear in front of the whole school with no shirt on. After that first rehearsal, I told the teacher I wasn't going to be a dancer, and they found somebody else.

That dancing thing reared its head up on me again a bit later in life, when I was to be ordained an elder. A year after completing seminary, the board of the ministry asked all the ordinands to plan our own ordination ceremony. You have to understand that this was at the tail end of the hippie years, when everything was weird. So the six or eight of us got together and as the meeting progressed, one of the other said, "I've got a great idea. We will all be sitting together at the front of the sanctuary, and after we are ordained, we can slip off our robes and take off our shoes and socks, and we can dance." Everyone else was excited, and agreed that this was great, except me, and I said, "All of you are more than welcome to dance, and I encourage you to dance, but there's nothing that I was taught in seminary that actually prepared me to dance. I could maybe do something else, a prayer or something, but there's just no way I could be up in the front of the sanctuary, dancing with my shoes off. I'm just way too shy for that. So I ain't dancin'. But you all go ahead."

Then the lady who had suggested the dancing in the first place said, "Well, we should either all dance, or all not dance, but if everyone but you dances, then you will be the one who didn't dance, and that could be difficult for you." And I said, "No, no. I'm okay with being the guy who didn't dance. Really." But they decided not to dance. We did something else, I don't remember what. I suppose I would still remember the ceremony better if we had danced. People think differently.

I've been changing diapers since 1959, the same year I got that book. My next youngest brother was born in 1959, I'm eleven years older than him, and when he was a baby we shared a bedroom. I delivered the Washington Post, so I had to get up when it was still dark in the morning and go out and deliver my route and then I would come home and he would be awake and I would get him up and change his diaper and feed him and get him ready for the day, and then another brother came, and I changed his diapers, and then years later my own children, and I changed their diapers, and now my grandchildren. Some weeks ago I took one of the babies into the nursery to change her diaper. I put her on the changing table, got out a diaper and started to change her, when my 4-year-old granddaughter Ella, you might have seen me and her together around here, she came in and she asked me, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm going to change her diaper." And so she reached in front of me and pulled the drawer open in the changing table and started to reach out a diaper. I said, "I already have a diaper," and she says, "Well, do you have baby wipes?" I said, "I do" and she said, "Okay. Just checking."

Everybody is crazy except me and thee, and sometimes I wonder about thee. There's been a lot of mirth in our family about a conversation that Karen and I had recently. Ever since I was a youngster, I have gone into the woods by myself, and throughout my adult life I've gone fishing in the mountains by myself if there was no-one else to go with me, and Karen thinks this is reckless, but I do it anyway. One day several weeks ago my son Alex and I went fishing in Rocky Mountain National Park and that evening I made the mistake of telling Karen that I had slipped on a rock and fallen onto my hands and knees in the stream. I wasn't hurt, I just got wet. But Karen said, "What would have happened if you had been alone and been hurt? I want you to promise me that you won't go fishing alone any more." And I answered, "I can't promise that." And in the way that spouses will sometimes exaggerate dramatically, in order to make a point, Karen said, "Well then, if you fall down and get hurt out there by yourself, I'm not gonna come looking for you." The kids were most amused when they heard this, and they laughingly piled on with "Yep, if Dad falls and gets hurt, that's it for him. He will have gotten what he deserves. Too bad, so sad." People think differently.

But while it's true that people think differently, something else is also true, and that is, we all think about the same things. We are all theological thinkers. Throughout our lives, we all ponder the same questions. Why are we here? Where did we come from? What is our nature? What will happen to us when we die? Is there life after death? Why is there suffering? Why is there evil? What is the meaning and purpose of our lives? We may express ourselves somewhat differently, but the focus of our thinking is the same. The apostle Paul understood this. The scriptures for this morning are very similar. It's helpful to understand the context of these passages. Both of the letters, First Corinthians and Romans, are believed to have been written in the period of about 55 to 57, during what is called Paul's Third Journey. First Corinthians was written first, from the city of Ephesus, Romans a bit later from the city of Corinth. Paul's conversion is dated to about 35 to 37, so with the writing of these letters, Paul has been at his ministry for about twenty years. He has founded several churches. Those churches have begun to mature, and people within them have developed strong opinions about what is most important in Christianity.

The news that he hears from his churches is pretty consistent. People are thinking differently. The various forms of ministry are in competition, and this competition of priorities threatens the unity of the congregations. Now in his letters Paul acknowledges that there are many ways of thinking, but all of that thinking leads us to one conclusion, that the love which Jesus taught is the love which remakes our world. So he puts it this way in First Corinthians. "Love is patient. Love is kind. 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. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." That one's pretty familiar to us because we hear it in weddings all the time. In Romans he puts it this way: "Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with mutual affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints. Extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you.

Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

What is genuine love? Why, it is transformative behavior. It is caring for people in such a way that their lives will be lifted up, and the world will be made better. We Christians call this grace. It is a love which need not be earned, which is given without reserve, as God loves us. We are called to grace as the way that God will transform our world. Seeing past the differences in the way people think, and drawing people in to our shared calling of grace is what Paul hoped for in the churches he had founded. I think Paul would enjoy this story. Roger Woolsey, the chaplain of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Colorado in Boulder, wrote a book which was published this year entitled *Kissing Fish: Christianity for People Who Don't Like Christianity*. Roger recounts in the book the time when he visited the general conference of the United Methodist Church when it was held in Denver in 1996. You may remember that there was a good deal of protesting and demonstrating outside the building by folks who don't like some of the things we do. When he arrived at the convention center, he got into an argument with one of the demonstrators. He writes this:

"It was on. The shouting match took off, and it was a truly epic match of tit-for-tat proof texting. Each of us proving how we were right and the other was wrong. In the midst of this nasty melee I felt a breeze against the back of my legs. I turned and saw a tall man in a suit reaching in between us with a large cookie in his hand, saying, "Have a cookie." They guy with the sign and I looked at each other, then at him, and then we took the cookie being offered. We broke it in half and started to enjoy the cookie. They guy in the suit walked off, hardly breaking stride at all. We found ourselves still arguing, but our volume level went way down, and we somehow shifted into a more civil mode of slightly more rational debate. Eventually, we honored each other as being fellow Christians. We shook hands and pledged to pray for each other. Later that day I came across that strange man in the suit, and went up to him and thanked him for offering that cookie to us as a means of grace and transformation. He replied, "What are you talking about? I was trying to put something in that guy's mouth so he'd shut up and let you speak." Well, even thought the tall man deflected with a bit of humor, I have a hunch the moment of grace and transformation was pretty intentional."

There's a footnote in the book as to the identity of that tall strange man in the suit, it's Reverend Chuck Schuster, currently at First United Methodist Church, Fort Collins.

I enjoy reading books about art and artists. Ted Orland wrote a book entitled *The View from the Studio Door*. He believes that the creation and appreciation of art is one of the qualities that defines our humanity. He may be right. I read last week that the Journal of Science has reported that archaeologists in South Africa have found a site that is a hundred thousand years old, and which includes some of the earliest sharp tools ever made by human beings, and evidence of fishing, and a place where red ochre paint was

mixed. Since our earliest days, art has been an important part of our lives. Orland's book is really a work of theology, intended to help artists find their identity in today's world, and he worries about our ability to create something positive. He wrote this: "In the span of a few generations, the entire balance of creative and destructive force in the world has changed radically. A century or two ago, tools of mass destruction did not exist, and in a de-centralized and largely agrarian civilization, there wasn't much any one person could destroy anyway. Of course, a lone madman in some small town could always burn down a few buildings, but to what advantage? Word of the act might not even travel to the neighboring village. On the other hand, a lone artist from some small town, say Stratford-on-Avon, could create art that would enrich the life of an entire civilization. There was a time when the potential for an individual to do good far outweighed their capacity to do harm. In today's world that pendulum has swung far to the other extreme. Today, the power to destroy vastly exceeds the power to create."

My first reaction when I read that was to agree, yes, that's true. But then I quickly thought, no. No, the power to destroy is never equal to the power to create. We believe in the transformation of the world through love. We believe in grace. We believe that love never ends.

One last story. Our family has had an amazing year. Karen told me I couldn't get through this. On January 11, Lily and Norah were born, 11 weeks early, at two pounds apiece. They were supposed to be here today, and you may have noticed we had a change in the music. My son-in-law Corey and Miles Sloniker and Karen were supposed to do some jazz, and Lily ended up in the hospital overnight. She's fine, it was precautionary, but that's why that changed. The babies were in the neonatal intensive care unit at Poudre Valley Hospital for 102 days, or three months. We were in crisis mode for weeks and weeks and weeks. When you are in crisis, you begin to think that you have to get past the crisis before you can go on. The crisis holds you captive. Things seem to stop moving forward as long as the crisis continues. I was fortunate enough to be able to visit the babies every day in the hospital, usually twice a day, morning and evening. One day when I came into the nursery, Norah was laying on a nurse's lap on her stomach. I bent over and said "Hello, Norah," and she spoke back to me with a kind of "Hmmm" in response to which the nurse said, "Oh, a familiar face." What the nurse meant was that Norah had recognized me, and her vocalization was one of recognition. I realized at this moment that these tiny babies weren't stuck in the crisis. They were doing what we talk about theologically. They were identifying their family. They were creating relationships with their family. They were getting on with the loving relationships which are at the center of our lives. Of course, we adults knew we were doing that. But you would think that these tiny babies would be so overwhelmed by all the endless activity around them, that they wouldn't have energy left for anything else. To realize that the babies got on with love, right away, that was a very grace-filled moment in my life.

Paul wrote, "Love never ends." Love is anxious to get started, too. I thought it would be nice to wrap up this morning with a work of art, but since I ain't dancin', I'm going to turn it over to the musicians. Thank you.