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**“The Love We Sing”
A Meditation for “Hymn Sing Sunday” based on 1 Corinthians 13:13**

As your staff was planning this worship service, and as I received with appreciation the hymn suggestions from you, and as I meditated on our scripture reference this morning from St. Paul – *“faith, hope, and love abide, these three”* – I found that one particular hymn kept going through my mind. Some of you may know it; it’s called *“O Love That Will Not Let Me Go.”* And then, in the funny way the mind sometimes work, I was reminded of a time or two when I had used the phrase “let go.” One of those times was one of those moments of parenthood that you swear you will never have – but then you find yourselves doing or saying exactly what you said you would never do or say! It was with one of our four children, I don’t remember which one now, who was going through one of those stages of being incredibly picky with food. Long after the rest of us were done with dinner, this child was still there, with most of the food untouched on the plate. And he – or it may have been she – wanted to leave the table. I remember saying *“I’ll let you go when you’ve eaten your whatever-it-was.”*

Now, even though at the time I probably would have rationalized this by saying I was just doing it out of love, I am very sure that our child didn’t see it that way. I don’t think he or she would have described it as *“O Love, That Wilt Not Let Me Go.”* It was probably more like *“O stubbornness that will not let me go.”* Lots and lots of years later, I have decided several things: my own mother was right when she said, concerning her own parenting, that she looked back and realized that there were some battles that just

didn't need fighting. Amen, Mom. And secondly, reflecting on this battle many years later, I do think that my action, at least in some small way, some very, very imperfect way, some way that was all mixed up with other far less noble things, was indeed motivated by love. For I also know what every parent in this room knows: that there is utterly no way that you could ever let go of the love that you have for your children, and that you do try, anyway, to live out that love in your relationship to them.

But you and I are never perfect at that, are we? For indeed our love gets mixed up with all kinds of other things, sometimes much less noble things. Our love does get tired and cranky. Our love has its tears and tatters. On this morning when we celebrate in song the faith that gives us life, we are reminded that when we think about God, we have to use analogies and images. We have to know God from our own experiences, experiences that are – or should be – aided by the wisdom of others. And sometimes, therefore, we know God by reflecting on how God's love both is and is not like our love. This is one of those times. For I am utterly convinced that at the center of the gospel is that wonderful line, again from St. Paul, that says that there is nothing, nothing, nothing in all of life, in all of creation, in all of our experience that will ever separate us from the love of God. There is nothing we can do that will make God stop loving us. Indeed, "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go" is a perfect way to sum up in song what Paul says in prose. Except for this, except for this: God's love, unlike yours or mine, is indeed perfect. It doesn't grow tired. It doesn't get mixed up with all kinds of other less honorable, less beautiful, things. As Max Lucado and many others have observed, "God loves us just as we are but loves us too much to ever leave us here we are." And isn't that a good description, really, of what any good parent tries to do? To

love his or her children just as they are and yet teach them and model to them behaviors and ways of life that will make their lives more fulfilling?

The good news this morning is that when we love – our children, our friends, our family – we are literally doing a God-like thing, one that pleases God. And the even better news is that this God whom we worship, the One whom we praise with song this day, is the One who indeed shall never let us go – when we feel like singing and when we don't, when we mess it up and when we get it right, when we are mixed up and muddled and when we are clear of eye and purpose. As you leave this worship service this morning, then, do two things: give thanks for that amazing love that never lets you or any go, and resolve to be even better at showing that love to someone whose life is a little lonely, someone who has felt given up on, someone who needs know what you know. Will you do that?