

Love, not luck

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In 1947, Langston Hughes published the poem "Luck":

Sometimes a crumb falls  
From the tables of joy,  
Sometimes a bone  
Is flung.

To some people  
Love comes,  
To others  
Only heaven.

The poem could be read as an ode to love. It could be read at weddings along with 1 Corinthians 13, the biblical ode to love. But that would miss the point of both the poem and the scripture.

Hughes is not talking about sweet romantic love, as if gooey eyes and pillow talk could replace God's promise of freedom, reconciliation, and forgiveness. He is describing the utter randomness of life and love, with hints of the injustice inherent in something we call "luck."

Crumbs falling from the tables of joy point me to the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7 who challenges Jesus to include her and her daughter in his vision of the kingdom, even if only by the crumbs falling from the table of the chosen. Jesus rises to the

challenge, accepts her rebuke, and heals her daughter. The irony of Hughes's poem may be for those who recognize heaven as something other than luck.

1 Corinthians 13 is also about more than romantic love. In the preceding chapter, Paul talks about how communities live together in unity, how they show respect and find equity among different types of people--among people with different gifts and tasks. He has just admonished the Corinthians to show the greater honor and respect to the weaker members of the community, to those who occupy lower social, economic, or political status, in order to keep the community in balance. When one member suffers, all the members suffer, he reminds them.

The love Paul describes is the kind of love that seeks out, that longs for and works toward, the well-being of others. This is the kind of love that is the basis for just relationships that don't just toss crumbs or fling bones to others.

Hughes is also referencing, at least in part, the absence of this kind of just relationships: relationships in which people truly seek the well-being of the other, so that luck is no longer a part of love.