

Written Copy: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a “The Love We Really Need”

4th Sunday @ the Epiphany

Sunday, January 30th, 2022

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² 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 have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ^{8a} Love never ends.

The text's intent

All that we say and do with each other, and the world, must be filled with and receive its power to serve and save from God's unconditional and sacrificial love. This love directs our words and actions to serve our Lord and Savior first, and others second. It prevents us from seeking our own welfare, honor, good, and standing at the expense of others. Without God's love to govern us and guide us we naturally work first for our own interests and our own glory. God's love is the only way we can love and forgive others as He loves and forgives us. When we minister with this love, we give a great witness to God's love shown in Jesus self-sacrificing and unconditional love that filled His life, death, and resurrection. When the Last Day comes all other gifts that the Spirit gives us will no longer be needed. The gift of faith that enables us to hold fast to what we cannot now see, and the hope we are given in what is to come will not be needed. The knowledge and discernment we have through Scripture, while sufficient to bring us to faith and to grow that faith is only partial due to our inability to see things through God's eyes. But love will remain throughout our life now, kept alive by the Spirit through Word and Sacrament, and we will be completely consumed by it when we receive our glorified bodies and souls. We will live in that love perfectly, towards God and each other, just as He has perfectly loved us in Christ Jesus.

Focus Statement:

The love described in this passage is the love that can only come from God. It's sacrificial and unconditional. It is the love that filled Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It is the love that comes to us in baptism and is to empower our gifts and talents to be used for His service. It is the love that moves us as sinners to live out the Gospel's forgiveness in our dealings with others.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We can read this passage and know how we should love one another and serve one another in love, and still remain unable to carry that out. We don't have His love naturally in our heart. And without it, even the most loving actions we show fall short.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Confess we fall short of loving one another as Christ calls us to. Hold fast to the love He shares in His gift of grace and forgiveness. With repentant hearts work at loving others through our words and actions as the Church, asking Christ to forgive us, asking others to forgive our imperfect loving, sharing with others this forgiving love that we receive through Word and Sacrament.

Subject Sentence: We Need Jesus Love to function as His Body

Introduction: Love is All We Need?

Once upon a time there was a Pastor of an up-and-coming church. They were growing when many others around them were not. And while they were able to offer a variety of worship styles and were gifted with musicians who could play and lead the worship, the big draw was the Pastor himself. Theologically speaking he was well read and well learned. He had a great knowledge of the Scriptures, and he was gifted at applying the beliefs and doctrines that the Lutheran Church confesses from them. He was a gifted preacher and teacher. He explained the hard-to-understand portions of Scripture so that even those who never read or studied the Bible could understand what was being said. While he loved his vocation, his goal was to be the pastor of the biggest congregation in town, and that he himself be the most beloved of pastors. Most who heard him teach and preach would say he was informative and entertaining, but that there was something lacking. Gradually attendance began to fall, and people stopped coming, many checking out the newer up and coming church in town that featured a newer pastor who was more entertaining, and who taught them just what they wanted to hear.

Once upon a time there was an Elder who loved and cared for the parishioners who were assigned to him; at least those who came to Church regularly on a Sunday, those who liked him and whom he liked in return. He was faithful to check in with them, ask them about their extended family, and even send birthday cards and Christmas cards to them. But when it came to those who did not attend at all, as well as those who didn't attend on a regular basis, he didn't have time for them. And those members who were not on his list he considered them not to be his problem. Eventually the other elders began to adopt his stance, and attendance began to dwindle. What many once considered to be a loving welcoming congregation began to be considered cold and unfriendly to strangers.

Once upon a time there was a couple that had been married for 40 years. Publicly they attributed the success and longevity of their marriage to the vows their holding fast to their marriage vows. The friends at Church thought that they had a loving relationship. But privately it was anything but loving. All couples fight, and they certainly did with a war of words. The fight would end when they called a truce. But it was a temporary truce. They never really forgave one another. They might say, "I forgive you", but there was always a catch. There was always a "but..." attached to the statement "I forgive you". Each one kept a mental note of the wrongs that had been said and done to them and were always ready to pull that list out and use it as needed to help win an argument. With COVID-19 forcing them to stay at home with just each other to deal with and relate to, the arguments and fights increased. And while they hadn't told anyone else, not even each other, they had both separately been contemplating divorce.

“Once upon a time”, the meaning here is that these scenarios are not based on any one person living or dead, but an amalgamation of many different people from my life, and some drawn from faucets of my own. All three of them needed love in their life. But what kind of love did they need?

On June 25th, 1967, The Beatles performed the song “All You Need is Love” live as part of the first global live satellite television transmission called “Our World” where nineteen different nations joined in with contributions unique to them. The Beatles provided Great Britain’s contribution. John Lennon called it a public service announcement for love and peace, which was the hippie slogan of the time. They sang “All you need is love; love is all you need.” While they sang young men and women dressed in the regalia of the time walked around with placards that had “All You Need is Love” written in various languages. The Beatles and others of their time thought that by promoting this cause of love and peace they could really change the world. Well, it didn’t happen. What happened was riots and unrest. And when the next generation came along, the one these Baby Boomers gave birth to, they drew the nicknamed “The Me Generation”, Even now the Baby Boomers that are in power have been unable to stop hatred and violence with their concept of love. They had part of it right, love is truly what we all need, just not the love that they were promoting. Not just any love is needed. What is needed is a special kind of love.

Paul Describes the Love We Do Need

In our Epistle Lesson Paul is describing the unique kind of love that can change hearts and minds and change the world. He is discussing this in light of what we learned last Sunday about what the Church is and how it functions. We are the Body of Christ, individual members with special gifts and talents given by the Holy Spirit who calls us to faith and places us into Christ’s Body. We are to use these gifts and talents in conjugation and unity with our fellow members of the Body to build one another up and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But what makes these gifts able to build up and proclaim the Gospel is the love that can only come from God Himself.

1 Corinthians 13:4-6 ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

What exactly is this special kind of love? It's sacrificial and unconditional. What does that mean? Paul describes what this kind of love looks like in the lives and ministry of the Body of Christ. It creates and sustains patience, or more accurately longsuffering. It keeps on loving and keeps on forgiving even when the other party does not. It doesn't keep track of the wrongs that others have done to us. It does not insist on its own way, nor does it turn irritable or resentful when it doesn't get its way. It's kind, moving one to help another and consider others more important than oneself. It doesn't envy or boast, it never wishes evil on anyone, even those who act as enemies, It never rejoices in wrongdoing, it never condones when God's will and word is not followed. In other words according to this love, two wrongs never make it right. It rejoices in the things that God Himself loves and approves of and seeks to share those things with others. This is the love that can only come from God Himself, a love that is sacrificial: moving one to sacrifice their time, talents, treasures, and even ego in the name of loving and saving others. It's unconditional: it moves one to love and forgive even those who refuse to forgive us.

Are you looking at this description of the love we need as the Church and thinking to yourself, "That's impossible! No one can love like that!" If not, you should be. I can't love like that, and neither can you. We can try, and have success to some extent, but you and I will always fall short. How patient and longsuffering are you with those who don't return your love, or those who are hard to love? How quick are you turn irritable and resentful? How often do you keep track of the wrongs done to you by others? We might be able to cloak these feelings for a while, but they naturally pop up in our hearts, and will eventually show through in our words and actions. We can't generate or create this kind of love.

This kind of love can only come from God. "Amazing Love, Oh What Sacrifice!" It comes to you from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the love that He has for you, had it from before you were born. It's the reason God the Son left His place with the Father and came into the Creation to be one of us. It's the reason He took to Himself a human body and soul and lived in the midst of the squalor, and hate, and selfishness that our sin has filled His perfect creation with. It's the reason He suffered at the hands of evil men and allowed them to take His life. It's the reason why He paid your debt of sin and died your death so that you, the guilty one, may go free. It's the reason why He sent His Spirit to you in your baptism, so that even as you turn away from Him, even as you refuse to love others as He calls you to, that sin and all others can continually be washed away. So that you, even to this day, can have your sin and guilt washed away, and live again. So you can live free from sin and guilt to love and serve Him with His love He gives to you. So that you can live to love and serve others with His love. So that you can live with Him now, and forever in eternal life.

The Love We Need that Never Ends

I need this love. You need this love. Your fellow parishioners need this love. We need to receive this love from the Word and Sacrament. We need to give and receive this love with one another as the Body of Christ. We need to share it with everyone who we come in contact with, even those who are difficult to love, especially those who are difficult to love. We don't have to be their best friend. But we do need to love and forgive them as Christ has forgiven us. This is the reason each one of you has been given talents and gifts as members of the Body of Christ, so that through what you say and do, and even through your presence here among us, you can share that love of God, and have it shared with you.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2 ¹ **If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.** ² **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 have not love, I am nothing.**

What happens if we are specially gifted, but lack this love of God in our words and actions? Paul is saying that even the greatest spiritual gifts and talents are useless unless they come from a heart that has God's love residing in it. All of these gifts and talents that make up the Body of Christ have the goal of sharing Jesus' love with others, of being Christ with skin on. It's what you and I need, and it's what the world needs to see, hear, and experience from us as the Body of Christ planted here to be His hands and feet, to share His Amazing Love with a loveless and darkened world.

1 Corinthians 13:7-8a, ⁷ **Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** ⁸ **Love never ends.**

This love from Christ is the power for you to patiently endure whatever trials may come, while continuing to hold fast to the promises of God that you have in Christ by faith. This love keeps alive in your hearts the sure and certain hope in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. And best of all, this love never ends.

1 Corinthians 13:13 **So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

Faith continues in your life as the gift of the Holy Spirit given in baptism. Through this gift you hold fast to the all the promises of Scripture that you cannot see, taste, touch, or feel. Through this power of faith we hope now in what is yet to come. But when that day comes, and we stand before Jesus in glorified bodies and with cleansed spirits, faith and hope will no longer be needed. All that we needed faith for, and all that we hoped in will be fully realized. But love, God's love that we have now in Jesus Christ, that love will never end. It will be ours to experience fully in a manner that we never have upon this earth. We will perfectly love our Lord and Savior with our whole being, and we will perfectly love one another. And we will live in that love forever and ever. That is the love you, and I, and the world truly needs.

Conclusion

Think back to those opening “Once Upon a Time” scenarios. What if that Pastor had applied that unselfish and unconditional God love to his parishioners and the lost in the community instead of himself? What if the Elder had that love for all parishioners, even those who do not regularly attend? What if that couple extended true forgiveness that doesn’t keep track of wrongs, because they begin to love one another as Christ loves them? I fail to live in Jesus’ love just as each of those characterizations do at times. But Jesus continues to share His love with me, and with you whenever you fall short of living in it. He pours that love into your heart and mind through His Word and through the Sacrament of the Altar. We can know that love best this side of eternity when we realize just how much we are forgiven for, and just how strong and abiding that love is through the means of grace. We grow in that love as the Holy Spirit continues to grow our faith and encourage us to love even as He loves us. May His love Amazing Love, that sacrificial and unconditional love be actively at work in you, keeping you steadfast in faith to life everlasting. Amen.