

1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 15, 2022

No one is getting married here today, in case you were wondering. Often this chapter or a portion of it is requested for use at a wedding. Once a young lady asked me to preach for her wedding the exact same sermon that I had given for her sister's wedding on this text. Actually it is not about marriage but about Christian love and the service offered by all of us. It bids us

HAVE LOVE

- I. Love shows
- II. Love lives
- III. Love lasts

The love that shows is a deeper term than we often use. I might readily tell you I love ice cream, but not in the way Paul is describing. Others say the same about a hair do or clothing. We mean we think it is great and it appeals to us.

We often talk about romantic love. On the last day of first grade as we waited to get picked up after our class picnic I told a sweet young thing that I loved her. I'm sure I had no clue as to what I was saying. In a similar way we tease a teen about "puppy love" when young daters have a crush on each other. Things get more serious when couples speak of "making love." Hormones are raging but it is really cheap sex with no concept of the depth of love Paul is commending to us.

He is talking about God's kind of love. We know it best by Jesus. His love for us was a giving, sacrificing kind of love. It is unlimited: remember that he gave up his life for us; he held back nothing. It is unconditional, that is, no strings attached—I'll love you if you first do...(something to qualify for it)." Also it is self-generated, not based on the worth or attractiveness of the object. We were totally undeserving of God's love because of our sins.

In today's Gospel reading we heard Jesus speak of a new command for Christians to love each other. Love did exist before then. Our Savior's summary of the commandments called for us to love God and our neighbor. As he was at this time about to go to the cross and suffer the pains of hell in our place, he showed a whole new dimension of the extent of love.

Christlike love directs the use of our spiritual gifts. The Corinthian congregation was endowed with many of them and they prided themselves in that blessing.

However, it became the source of problems, such as rivalry in whose gifts were best and bragging rights about service rendered. The gifts became an end in themselves and they forgot their purpose. Some of them might be great feats. "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." Knowing God's Word, performing miracles, giving your life as a martyr, all mean nothing if love is not behind it. Rather we are no more than noisy percussion: a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. We're only interested in getting attention and do not reach the goal of touching souls with the love of Jesus.

II.

Rather, love lives. It comes across in daily circumstances, responding to others. Admittedly, it can be a challenge, but "Love is patient," and later, "always perseveres." People put us to the test. They can be irritating and annoying. They don't live up to our expectations or ideals (of course, remember that others likely view us the same way). Does anyone ever have enough patience and perseverance? We all have room to grow and improve.

Love does not envy or boast. Many are naturally competitive so compare themselves with those around them. We become jealous of what others have, receive or can do. To make up for what we feel we are lacking we then may brag about our own abilities and accomplishments, puff ourselves up and look down at anyone we can view as beneath us.

Other qualities to put off are being rude, self-seeking and easily angered. Guilty on all counts, right? Viewing ourselves as number one may come naturally but it is not the way of love. When full of ourselves we become discourteous, riding roughshod over the feelings and needs of others as we are busy grabbing for our own pleasure or recognition. If we don't receive what we felt should be coming to us we fly off the handle, grumbling about unfairness and mistreating everyone who crosses our path. Think about road rage as a driver cuts you off or didn't grant you the right of way, causing you to hit the brakes or delaying you a few moments. Our reaction is way out of proportion to the slight endured.

Love also "keeps no record of wrongs." It does not recite date and time years ago when you felt mistreated. When we flood our memories with wrongs suffered we think we see a pattern and the bitterness or hatred builds up as we dwell on it and magnify the slight received. What was likely an unthinking act of the other person's self-focus becomes viewed as deliberate meanness.

Rather than react with such negativity love seeks benefit for others. It looks for the positive. "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes." It safeguards the reputation of others. You may have been taught as a child, "If you can't say something good about someone, don't say anything at all." Good advice. Don't be the first to share juicy gossip. Give a person the benefit of the doubt. There may be a good explanation to what they said or did. Hope for the best rather than conclude the worst, even if it is the first thing that pops into your mind.

Rejoice in the truth. It may be more boring than the fake news but it is right. Share good news about others, rejoice when life goes well for them and blessings are received.

As we hear the qualities of a living love we recognize that we often fail. Like all of God's laws, the law of love is impossible to keep. We fail daily at home with those who are closest to us and whom it would seem most natural to love. We fare little better in our connections with others, whether it is at work or school, in community and church activities. Our wrongs when it comes to matters of loving make Christ's love so wonderful as he announces his forgiveness for all of our sins. His goodness fills us and overflows. That's why we keep coming back to his Word and to his house to receive that good news. Have his love and it becomes a living part of you. Blessings then abound. Love, peace and harmony prevail in our relationships.

III.

What's more, that love lasts. Most things do not. So much of what we devote our time and efforts to doesn't endure. The fortunes we toil to accumulate, the monuments we erect will all pass on or crumble to dust. Some pass quickly away from us during life. Others may stick around for a length of time on this earth, but none will last forever.

That is true even of some spiritual gifts. Paul mentioned prophecies. When they are fulfilled they are no longer as important. The gift of tongues was prized among the Corinthian members. That was the ability to speak other languages as had happened on Pentecost. In heaven it won't be needed as we join in praising God together as pictured in the Second Lesson of the past two weeks. What language we will be speaking there isn't part of what has been revealed to us, but I'm sure we will all understand or there will be a cacophony of jubilant praises sounding forth. Paul also mentioned knowledge passing away. That spiritual gift involves grasping and being able to explain spiritual truths, a blessing now but not needed

then. Instead everyone will know by experience the joys which God has in store for us and the greatness of his being and work.

Many aspects of our existence will not endure but God's love does. It brings us to heaven, the gift of our Savior. The Apostle noted we will have fuller knowledge than we do at present. He compared our present condition to looking at a mirror. Back then mirrors were made of polished metal so the image viewed was not so clear. Even with the sparkling glass mirrors we have now what we see in a mirror is only a reflection. In heaven we will have the real thing. Our questions will be answered. We will understand many of the whys we question presently—why did that happen to me, why didn't my prayers get answered right away or in the manner I desired, why was this option not open to me but the other one was. Either we will know them or it won't matter to us any longer. We will understand more about God, although we will never equal him in knowledge.

While much will pass away, the great three remain. "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." We will have faith that trusts God 100%. We will hope for yet more joys. We will never be able to say, "I've seen it all." Heaven will not be boring. God's blessings will be fresh and continuous. We will have perfect love, for God and for others. Our love will be purified and whole, like his love for us.

You have God's love today. Bask in it. Keep returning to your loving Lord when your love fails. Be filled with his love, overflow with it, share it. It will show as a living part of you and it will last. Live in Christ's abounding and abiding love!