

Quinquagesima Sunday

1 Corinthians 13:1-13: "Love Is from God."

February 13/14, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O Lord, we pray You heartily: Grant us Your love. Let our whole life be love. Amen. (*Book of Family Prayer*, p. 439)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the thirteenth chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not 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 have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. / Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. / Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. / When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. / So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whose incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection are proof of God's eternal love for mankind, dear fellow redeemed:

"Love" is one of the deepest words we have, but it is also one of the cheapest. The word "love" is used to describe one's affection and commitment to a spouse, and it is used to describe one's affinity for chocolate. We might say we "love" a sports team, a song, or a certain food, but we don't mean it in the same way as the love we have for our family. So what does the word actually mean?

We learn about love in today's reading from 1 Corinthians. The Holy Spirit guided St. Paul to write specifically about *agape* love. The ancient Greeks had a number of words for "love," including *philia* (brotherly love), *eros* (romantic love), and *storge* (love within a family). But the highest form of love is *agape* love, which is compassionate, sacrificial love. This is the love that God wants us to have toward one another. And it is the kind of love He has toward us.

We have nothing good to offer—nothing meaningful to share—if we do not have love. Paul wrote that even if he could speak in the language of the angels or had perfect understanding and knowledge or gave up everything he had, but those things were not coupled with love, then they are worthless. He states very clearly that godly love will never be motivated by selfishness; it will not be focused inward. It will be outward, focused on those around us.

But this godly love does not come naturally to us. What comes naturally to us are the behaviors that Paul lists as the opposite of love, things like envy, boastfulness, arrogance, rudeness, and self-centeredness. This is often what we see in society from those who claim to be pursuing the path of love. Their notion of “love” is more about self-fulfillment than self-sacrifice. For them, “love” is the thing they feel when they are doing what they want to do. And they expect that kind of love to be supported no matter how unhealthy or destructive it may be.

But we do not approve of alcoholism simply because a person loves to drink, or robbery because someone loves the thrill of taking what isn't theirs, or pornography because a person loves the high it gives them. As Paul wrote, love *“does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.”* Love and truth go together. There is no love apart from truth, and no truth apart from love, because both love and truth come from God.

God is the source of all that is good, and love is certainly good. That's why the devil works so hard to corrupt it. He does not want us to be patient and kind, generous and forgiving, humble and gracious. He wants us to give in to *“the desires of the flesh,”* which are *“against the Spirit”* (Gal. 5:17). He wants us to turn our love inward, to put ourselves first. The devil wants us to become angry with God when He does not give us what we want. And he wants us to demand love from others on our terms and to treat them badly if they don't. In other words, the devil wants us to ignore the Ten Commandments.

God has put each Commandment in place to protect love. He teaches us what it means to love Him and to love our neighbor. We love Him by giving Him the glory He deserves, honoring His name, and hearing His Word. We love our neighbor by respecting authority, defending life, upholding marriage, and so on. To make it even clearer for us, God summarizes the Ten Commandments in these two statements: *“love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”* (Deu. 6:5). And, *“love your neighbor as yourself”* (Lev. 19:18). This is *agape* love; it is love directed outward. On our own, we are not capable of this love. We cannot and do not love like we should.

The newly married couple learns this very quickly. On their wedding day, they look at each other with stars in their eyes and promise to love each other *“for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health,”* until death parts them. They may even choose today's text to be read at their wedding: *“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude.”* *“That's how I will love you,”* they promise. But it isn't long before that feeling changes, before troubles come, before the loving bride and bridegroom start to snap at and criticize one another.

No matter what our best intentions are, we find ourselves failing at love. So we tell ourselves that we will do better, we will try harder. But we keep failing. We fail because love does not come from inside us. Love comes from God. There is no love apart from Him. If there were no

God, if everything came about as the result of a big bang and billions of years of evolution, there would be no love. There is no love where the central principle is the “survival of the fittest.”

But there is a God, and He is a God of love. Some people reject God because of this statement. “If He is a God of love,” they say, “then why does He sit back and watch so many horrible things happen in the world? Why doesn’t He end all the suffering?” But God does not just sit back and watch, and He did bring an end to suffering—just not in the way they want. God’s love is realized not by all our temporal problems disappearing, but by His answer for our eternal problems—our sin and the punishment in hell that we deserve.

This is where God’s love shines brighter than any love we could imagine. The Apostle John writes: *“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1Jo. 4:9-10). This is how God came to fight for our sinful souls. He brought love to the battle against Satan, sin, and death.

The enemy wasn’t expecting that. They know nothing about love. That’s what makes it the perfect weapon. The powers of darkness have no answer for it. God’s love is stronger than hatred, stronger than all evil. God rescued us with love. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son”* (Joh. 3:16). This is *agape* love—compassionate, sacrificial love.

God the Father sent His Son to save us, to give His life in our place. And His Son willingly accepted the task. This is how much God loves us! It is easy to love those who love us. But it is supremely difficult to love those who hate us. In fact, this is impossible for us to do on our own. But God is perfect, so His love is perfect too. His love for us is not dependent on our love for Him. He loves us because He *is* love.

What else could move God’s Son to be born a Man, so that He might humble Himself and make Himself a Servant of all? What else could bring Him to patiently endure all the hatred, indignity, and scorn, to become the target of violence, abuse, and punishment? He did all this because of love, love for you, love for your eternal soul. One of our hymns says: *“Love caused Thy incarnation, / Love brought Thee down to me; / Thy thirst for my salvation / Procured my liberty. / O love beyond all telling, / That led Thee to embrace, / In love all love excelling, / Our lost and fallen race!”* (*The Lutheran Hymnal* #58, v. 4).

You are saved because of His love. Your sins are forgiven because of His love. Eternal life is yours because of His love. You now stand holy and pure before Him because of His love. All the love that you have failed to show toward God and neighbor, His love covers over. Everything that you have failed to do according to God’s Holy Law, Jesus has fulfilled for you. This perfect fulfillment of His Law of love is credited to you by faith, faith alone. *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes,”* writes St. Paul (Rom. 10:4).

But Jesus is not just love for you. The power of His love for you produces love in you. His Word and Sacraments awaken in you the desire to love. He moves you to love others as He has loved you. When you hear His Gospel words of love and eat and drink His body and blood which He

so lovingly gives you, His love is planted in you and grows in you. He produces through you the kind of love that Paul describes, the love that is self-sacrificing, not self-serving.

And when you love in that way, with *agape* love toward God and neighbor, all the glory is His. This love is not from you, it is from God. The love you show your family members, your friends, your neighbors—all of it is a gift from the God who “*is love*” (1Jo. 4:8,16).

Everything that Paul writes about love in today’s text that we have failed to carry out, the Lord has done out of love for sinners: “*[He] is patient and kind; [He] does not envy or boast; [He] is not arrogant or rude. [He] does not [seek to serve Himself]; [He] is not irritable or resentful; [He] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [He] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*” God is love, and He loves you.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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