

1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Third Sunday of Easter
Sermon Series: What Is Truth?
I Have a Family I Can Love!

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
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If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

We pray. Lord, sanctify us with the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Our message this morning is based on the words which we read a few minutes ago from 1 Corinthians 13. That chapter has come to be known as the great Love chapter of the Bible. I think it's up there among the more familiar passages of Scripture. It's one that is often quoted in Christian greeting cards; and lots of wall hangings or refrigerator magnets may have some of the words from that passage like, **love never fails**, or, **love bears all things**.

It's also a section of Scripture that we often hear at weddings. And it's great for husbands and wives to be reminded of the love that Jesus has shown them which they are now able to share with each other, but what is really remarkable is that these verses aren't just meant for husbands and wives, they're meant for all Christians. And the love that is described in these verses is the love that we find and are able to share in our Christian family.

This year during the season of Easter, we're spending each week focusing on the truths that we can be absolutely certain of because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Last week, the truth we looked at was the truth of the single greatest relationship that we have, our personal relationship with God. The bottom line in that relationship is that despite the fact that we are sinful people, we are "good" with God. We're good with God because He loves us and because He put that love into action by sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross for us to bring us the peace of forgiveness.

Today we get to look at the next most important relationship we have: our Christian family. In our Gospel lesson this morning, we saw the command that Jesus gave us the night before He died: **Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If**

you love one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples (Jn 13:34, 35). So the source of our love is Jesus. **We love because He first loved us** (1 Pe 4:13). He loved us, He showed us how to love, and more than that, He has given us the capacity—the ability—to love. And now, He commands us to show that love to the members of our Christian family.

In 1 Corinthians 12, the chapter right before this morning's text, Paul talks about the different kinds of spiritual gifts that each Christian has. Today, God reminds us that no matter what gifts He's given you, they're completely worthless if they aren't used and controlled and guided by love. Now some of you might get a little bit skeptical when we talk about spiritual gifts, maybe you feel that you don't have any, maybe you feel that the gifts you have aren't all that important. Do you know how to discover your spiritual gifts? Do you know how you develop the ones that you have? Love. If we put the kind of love that Paul describes in these verses, the kind that Jesus demonstrated for us, into practice in our lives, we'll discover what we have to offer the other members in this family, the other parts of the body. And the more we practice that love the more we put it to work in our lives the stronger and more beneficial those gifts will become.

So let's take a few minutes to dig into this picture of love that God had the Apostle Paul paint for us and look at each of those individual traits of love that he lists. As we do that, there are a few things that I'd like you to think about. First of all, how do I see this characteristic of love in the love that Jesus showed for me? Second, how much do I see this characteristic of love in how I interact with my brothers and sisters in Christ? And finally, what can I do to improve on that, and how will that, in turn, be a blessing to my Christian family?

Paul starts this definition, this explanation, of love with the words: **Love is patient**. Now there's an old saying that "Patience is a virtue." And the Bible tells us patience is a fruit of the Spirit. They aren't really saying anything different. Any virtue that we have is only made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. And as we go through this list, you'll find that each one of these characteristics of love is a virtue, a fruit of the Spirit which we are capable of only through faith in Jesus and by the power of His gospel at work in us. Patience is the ability to endure something without getting angry or indignant. Usually we think of patience when we're faced with waiting. Because standing in line is really all it takes for us to start getting bitter and irritated. But the patience Jesus teaches us to show one another tolerates much more than waiting. It endures humiliation, oppression, injury, and all kinds of evil all while still being perfectly loving.

And love isn't just about what we passively endure; it's also about what we actively do. And so Paul goes on: **Love is kind**, it's courteous. A loving person always wishes the best for other people, but they don't just wish the best for them, they look for ways to be useful to them and to make them happy. Kindness isn't just taking advantage of those opportunities; it's actively seeking them out, Always looking for every way to help someone, and then doing it.

It stands to reason, if we're looking for opportunities to make others happy that when they do find happiness we'll rejoice with them. So we also see that, **Love does not envy**. Envy is the opposite of rejoicing with someone else in their happiness. Envy sees the happiness of others and feels uneasy, discontent, and embarrassed that someone else has something we don't that makes them happy. Envy only cares about our own happiness. But when we truly love someone, and we see that they are happy and that their happiness stems from the blessings God has given them, then we can rejoice that God has been kind to them too.

Love does not envy and love does not boast. If envy comes from the feeling that others are superior to us, boasting comes from the feeling that we are superior to others. But if we love

our Christian family then when God provides us with certain gifts and blessings that others don't have, rather than flaunting those gifts, we'll want to recognize them for what they are—gifts from God!—and show our thanks to Him by putting those gifts to use in ways that will build up and encourage those who have less.

Next, we read that **Love is not proud.** Now, pride isn't really all that different than boasting. Boasting is one of the ways that people express their pride. But not everyone who is proud expresses it through boasting. The Greek word for pride actually comes from their word for bellows, the device that was used to puff a burst of air onto a fire. The idea is that pride is what we feel when we get puffed up. And we get puffed up when we look at everything that we have going for us. But when love our brothers and sisters, we see everything that they have going for them. And we really start to appreciate that we are only one part of the body and that all the other parts are important and special as well.

Love is not dishonorable. As we seek to practice the love that God has shown to us, we'll always want to do whatever is proper and becoming for whatever circumstance or relation of life we've been placed into. In love, we treat everyone as they ought to be treated and as we ought to treat them and not as our sinful nature may want to treat them.

Love is not self-seeking. I think this quality by itself sums up all of what love is better than any of the others. If we love each other, then we won't put the pursuit our own happiness or welfare as our number one priority. And we won't ever pursue it at someone else's expense. Now, God isn't teaching us self-neglect here. He doesn't want us to disregard our health, or our welfare, or our happiness, or our salvation. What He wants is for us to seek those things not simply for ourselves, but in order to glorify Him by achieving the purpose for which He created us and redeemed us. At times, that may mean that we deny ourselves some comfort, or some time, or some of the material blessings God has blessed us with in order to show love to our neighbors and bring glory to God. But as we do that, and as we do it in love, you'll find it's even more rewarding than seeking out our own good.

Love is not easily angered. This, I think, is pretty similar to the first trait: **Love is patient.** When we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, then if they do something that offends us, even if they intentionally provoke us we won't burst out in anger. We'll want to put the best construction on whatever it is they have done and if they are in the wrong, then we'll seek to resolve the issue so we can both walk away in the peace of forgiveness.

Once that reconciliation has been reached after a dispute between brothers and sisters in Christ, and that relationship is restored to the loving relationship God intended, there is no reason to harbor a grudge anymore or go looking for more fault to find with that person. Because, **Love keeps no record of wrongs.** Instead, we'll take everyone's words and actions in the kindest possible way, try to see the best in them, and try to help them be that best.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. As we live lives of love, we won't find delight in sinning against other people, we won't find delight in sinning privately against our God, and we won't find delight in the sins of other people. Instead, we'll find delight in the truth—in Jesus—and in the success of His Gospel. When we see the power of that gospel at work in the lives of others, *that* is what truly brings us joy.

These next four fit closely together, **Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.** With that first part, **Love always protects**, many of us are familiar with a different translation: "love bears all things." The Greek verb that could be translated either as protects or bears comes from the Greek word for "roof." Love is like a roof. Just like a roof bears all kinds of storms and adverse weather, love endures all of the times that members of our

Christian family act toward us in ways that aren't loving. And just like a roof protects the family inside, in love, we protect our family (even when they sin against us) by not dragging their name through the mud at the first opportunity or pointing out their sins to everyone else but by patient with them and quick to forgive them when they acknowledge their sins.

We don't do that because love is blind, or because it makes us gullible. We do it because **Love always trusts.** When we have loving relationships with one another then we will always give each other the benefit of the doubt. In love, we're willing to assume that whatever is being done is being done with good intent. That doesn't mean we throw prudence to the wayside, but we need to be willing to entertain a good opinion of others even when there may be evidence to the contrary.

And when, despite our loving inclinations, we find that someone's intentions are not good and that we can no longer trust them then **Love still always hopes.** We know the power of the gospel of Christ and the effect that it has on the lives of fellow human beings. So as we deal with someone who is in error patiently, as we endure the wrongs they commit against us, we do it with hope in God's promise: that if we allow the gospel, the good news of His love, to predominate then we can look forward to growth and development in the faith of that fellow believer. We can even be instrumental in helping to strengthen them.

We can do that, because **Love always perseveres.** We persist in love in our dealings with our Christian family with the hope that all of us might continue to grow and be strengthened in that love.

And finally, **Love never fails.** Of all of the varied spiritual gifts that God has poured out on the individual members of His family, the Church, He's given all of us love. And while almost all of those other gifts will come to an end as they reach their completion in heaven. Love between Christian brothers and sisters and between Christian children and their heavenly Father will continue for all eternity.

So there you have it. The next time someone asks you, "What is love?" you can tell them. If you think back to those questions I asked you to consider as we worked through this picture of love, I think we can all see what a tremendous blessing it would be if we would all always live toward each other with that kind of love. And I think we all realize—we all can admit—that we have a long ways to go in this lesson of love. Love never fails, but we have. We've shown God and each other insufficient love, imperfect love, fake love, and sometimes no love at all.

But God's love never failed. He put His love into action by sending us a Savior, His Son Jesus. And in Jesus, we see the truth of all of those characteristics of love. In Jesus, we see patience through all of His suffering, and the greatest kindness of all as gave His life for our salvation. In Jesus, we see our Savior who was never envious, boastful, proud, or dishonorable, but who lived His life in perfect obedience to God—in perfect love—as our perfect substitute. He was never self-seeking but sought only to seek and to save us, the lost. He is not angered by our sins and He does not keep a record of them not because He delights in our sins but because He rejoices in the truth, that those sins are no more. He has washed them away with His blood. He brings us protection, trust, and hope with a perseverance that never fails.

Jesus demonstrated His love for us throughout His entire life and He showed it when He died for our sins. And then He rose again proving that His sacrifice of love was sufficient that He has made us members of His family. And now He continues to share that love with you through that Christian family. Never take that blessing for granted. These men and women and girls and boys gathered around you this morning are not just some random collection of people.

They are you're family. So get to know them! Spend time with them. Talk to them. Find out what makes them tick. Get into their lives and let them get into yours. Discover what it is that they offer you and find out what you might be able to offer to them. Rejoice in the glorious Easter truth that you have a family—a Father and brothers and sisters—that love you. You have a family you can love.

Amen.