

May 18th, 2025

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Pastor Priewe

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 NIV

¹If 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. ²If 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. ³If 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.

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

⁸Love 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. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹When 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. ¹²For 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.

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

The Most Excellent Way: Living a Life of Lavish Love

- 1. Love is essential**
- 2. Loves looks like Christ.**
- 3. You look like Christ.**
- 4. Love looks like you.**

Our sermon text today, 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most poetic and recognizable sections of Scripture. It is often selected for a reading at weddings because it gives a beautiful and tangible description of love, which makes it a pretty good choice for a couple to think about as they unite in Christian marriage. But when we put chapter 13 back into the 16-chapter letter to the Corinthians, we realize that Paul wasn't writing about love for the occasion of a wedding, he was writing about love for a congregation that was plagued by division and competition.

Context and Setting

Earlier in the letter Paul had described the situation in Corinth. One guy followed Paul, another followed Apollos, another followed Peter. They were all split up into camps, partial to their own particular leader. Meanwhile, they were a very spiritually gifted congregation. God had blessed them through the Holy Spirit with all kinds of great spiritual gifts. Some had gifts of wisdom and knowledge. Some had extraordinary gifts of faith that could do awesome things like miraculous healings or speaking in tongues or prophesying. But as can happen when you get a lot of really talented players on one team, sometimes they play for themselves individually rather than for the team. So Paul spent an entire chapter in verse 12 pleading with them to live and work together as the body of Christ, for the benefit of each other. He was trying to get to the heart of the problem: they were rich in talent and poor in love.

So Paul begins this section by saying, **"I will show you the most excellent way."** (1 Cor. 13), and then he launches into the beautiful LOVE chapter of the Bible. So our sermon today pieces those two things together—***The Most Excellent Way: Living a Life of Lavish Love***.

1. Love is essential

First, the Apostle Paul actually shows us what happens when love is missing. **“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or clanging cymbal.” (1 Cor. 13:1)** (Just banging on a drum or making noise, we might say.) There were people in the congregation that could genuinely speak in ecstatic, supernatural speech given by the Holy Spirit, but as they did so, they seemed to be giving the stark impression that they were superior to the schlubs who couldn’t do that. They were using their gift without being loving. And the same for the really smart people. **“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge,”** (2) and the same for the people who were working miracles and giving a ton of themselves. While those all are great gifts and grand things to be doing, they apparently figured out a way of using their gifts for their own glory rather than in love for Christ and his body. So Paul has to make the point for them, **“If I do not have love, I am nothing... and I gain nothing.” (1 Cor. 13:3).** Love has to accompany those different gifts and services, it has to be there. *1. Love is essential* to our Christian life.

That really makes you stop and reflect doesn’t it? It does for a guy like me that loves to do a lot more than he loves to love—action, progress, effort, productivity, accomplishment, to-do lists turned into “gott’er done lists. You mean, Paul, that I can work my tail off, doing my best to put food on the table and take care of my family, and stay on top of all my job responsibilities to my congregation, and try to write and preach a good sermon, but still have it amount to nothing? Yes—if I do it without love! If I glorify myself while pushing my brother or sister in Christ down, then that’s exactly what happens. Ooof! Ouch! This first section might sound poetic and beautiful but it’s quite convicting because I know there’s stuff I do without love, or it’s the first thing to go when I’m busy or frustrated.

1.a What does love look like?

Let’s look a little further. What does love look like in practice? How do I tell if I have it or not? Paul lays out the well-known description. How does it compare to me? To you?

“Love is patient,” - I rarely am.

“Love is kind,” – I am when it suits me, or when I feel like it, or when others are watching, but no one should know the sassy thoughts in my head.

“It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.” I, on the other hand, love to make sure what I do is seen and recognized and credited to me.

“It does not dishonor others,” The 8th commandment, the one about protecting reputations, is often the most trivial and optional to me.

“It is not self-seeking.” I think the world revolves around me, the apple of God’s eye.

“It is not easily angered,” My fuse lights in a second.

“It keeps no record of wrongs.” I keep long lists tucked away in my brain for the next time I need them.

“Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. Oh, there are times where I like to sin, and I don’t like what God’s word says about it.

“It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” Pggh, always... I do those things, if things are good, or if they are briefly bad, but if any discomfort or

suffering lingers beyond what I deem acceptable, all that goes out the window, so you better not push it, God.

I'll tell you in all honesty, nothing makes me feel like a total failure quite like this list in 1 Corinthians 13. They may be beautiful poetic words, but they don't paint a very good picture of me. So what do I do when I realize my love stinks? Try a little more? Just be a little more positive? Don't be so hard on yourself? Try to do one nice thing a day? All lies from the father of lies.

2. Love looks like Christ

When God's Word brings you to see exactly what you are and that your love stinks, then it's time to look away from yourself completely, and look at Christ, the one who loved you so completely that he gave himself up for you. Look and see the one who is patient and kind and does not treat us as our sins deserve. Look at the one who did not boast or keep his position on high, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant and becoming obedient to death on the cross. Look at Jesus who did not retaliate when they hurled their insults at him, but entrusted himself to God—always, willingly, perfectly. See the Friend who knows all about you, every sin you've ever committed, and loves you anyway, omniscient and yet choosing to remember the list no more—the charges dropped, the record expunged, sins forgiven.

Friends, you must look to the very heart of God's love letter to you and see the One who loves purely, who always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres, and it is not you! It is Jesus Christ the Righteous one. **2. Love looks like Christ!** And in the great divine mystery, he has chosen to love you with an everlasting love.

And more than that, our great God and Father, who perfectly loved his holy Son, also loved us to the degree that he would be willing to exchange the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to himself. And when his Son paid the price of our redemption, then the Father credited his Son's righteousness to us, to be received by faith.

3. You look like Christ!

So what does that mean for you? What does your love look like to God? If it's just you, like we said before, it stinks to high heaven! But with Christ, in place of you, for you, over you, through you, you and your love are made perfect. **3. You look like Christ!** You are God's holy and dearly loved child. Now you can go down Paul's list again and answer it very differently. Love is patient. Am I? Wrong question. Was Jesus? Yes! And I get the credit. Am I kind? Jesus was! and through faith, I get the credit, and so on down the list. It feels to us like cheating on the test, but it's what the riches of God's grace say that I get to do. (Ephesians 2:7). By faith, I look like Christ.

4. Love looks like you!

Now let me show you what has happened. We said, 2. Love looks like Christ, and 3. By faith, you and I look like Christ. Now all we need to do is apply the transitive property of Geometry from your high school days. The transitive property says that if A=B and B=C, then A=C. In our case, love looks like Christ, and you look like Christ, then it's also true that **4. Love looks like you!** The Spirit of Christ, who is working and living in us, transforms your characteristics and actions to match with the holy and loving actions of Christ. Now we are enabled to love like Christ loved us.

Yet there is still a great paradox! The Holy Spirit is living and working in people who are still sinners at the same time that they are saints. So there's this battle, this conflict. We see what the loving thing to do is. We know what's good. We know we should be patient or shouldn't boast, but our sinful nature is always right there with us telling us to forget love and do what's bad. And yet Holy Spirit is also there, crucifying the flesh, whispering to our heart. "Love is patient. Love is kind. And so are you, dear child of God." Love isn't boastful or proud or self-seeking or easily angered, and neither are you."

Even when you're children are driving you up the wall. Even when that person just did the same thing for the 77th time. Even when you are tired and worn and suffering and feel like you have not one more drop of love or hope or perseverance, the **"one who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 1:6). You are the image of Christ in this world. You are channel of the Holy Spirit's inexhaustible love, waiting to be poured out on others through you.

Now how do we actually do it—you know, some of that action, progress, and productivity I mentioned before. See the opportunity to love in front of you. Reflect on the challenge it presents and fullness of love you've been given in Christ. Pray for strength! Then put on love and love your neighbor like Christ loved you. Walk the extra mile. Offer yourself in humility and service. Look like Christ, by looking like love, and by this you will be known as a disciple of Christ—to God's glory. Amen.