



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (C) – 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Focus: Love is the Greatest

word of life

“And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

This popular and familiar passage on love is often read at weddings and anniversaries. Yet the context of this passage suggests a much broader understanding than the love between two persons. Previously, Paul has addressed the conflicts in Corinth over the use of spiritual gifts. (See 1 Corinthians 12-13.) Paul offers this reminder: Each of us has been joined to the body of Christ through our baptism. That changes everything. We are to not only discover and discern our spiritual gifts, but we are to use our gifts for the good of the community.

Paul concludes chapter 12 with an invitation, “But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.” (1 Corinthians 12:31 NRSV) Love is that more excellent way. This passage describes how empty and meaningless each of our lives would be without love. Again, Paul is not addressing love between two people, but agape love – divine love extended through us to our neighbor, a sacrificial, undeserved love.

1. *How is love a more excellent way?*
2. *How do we learn to love?*

If I (or you) speak in tongues, have great understanding, prophesy, have all powers, move mountains, give everything away, and volunteer to die a martyr’s death, it would mean nothing without love. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3) Spiritual gifts without love don’t amount to anything. The list could be expanded beyond spiritual gifts. If I (and you) have lots of money, a big house, an incredible job, the latest fashions, and trophies in the trophy case, but do not have love, then what is gained?

3. *Give other examples of what becomes meaningless without love.*

Paul digs deeper, describing what love is and what love is not. Love is patient and kind. Love is not envious, boastful, arrogant, rude, irritable, or resentful. Love does not insist on its own way nor seeks an advantage. Paul is describing a mature love, one that genuinely looks out for the well-being of others. Imagine a church which fulfills its capacity to love each other as Paul describes.

4. *How does knowing Christ enable Paul to describe love?*
5. *Although Jesus Christ is not mentioned in this passage, where do you find Christ implied?*

“[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” (1 Corinthians 13:7-8 NRSV) Remember Paul’s audience is a church in conflict. Paul invites followers of Christ to see love as a superior way rather than using individual gifts and achievements as a self-promotion. These things will pass with time. It is time to put away childish ways and grow up in Jesus Christ. “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13 NRSV)

6. *How is love the greatest?*
7. *Is it possible to love as Paul described? If not, do we try? Explain your answer.*

Word among

Read aloud the following adaptation of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 as printed below:

I am patient; I am kind; I am not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. I do not insist on my own way; I am not irritable or resentful; I do not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoice in the truth.”

Take a moment to reflect on that reading.

1. *How did that feel to read through this adaptation of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7?*
2. *What phrase, if any, felt awkward to read? How so?*

It is one thing to read about love, but it is something else to claim the characteristics of love as one’s own identity. When we were children, we might have insisted on our own way. But, just as children hopefully grow out of their self-centered stage, we too might grow into adults who have the capacity to care for others. The question has been raised if the love described by Paul is within the realm of human possibility.

3. *As we mature, is it easier or more difficult to love as Paul describes? Explain your answer.*
4. *What part of love do you hope God strengthens in your life?*
5. *Who in your life embodies 1 Corinthians 13?*

Paul describes God’s divine love flowing through us and extending to others. The Spirit creates in us a new creation with a capacity to share God’s love shown in Jesus Christ. We love because God first loved us. We are freed in Christ to love with a genuine regard for others, not because we will get something out of it. We love and serve our neighbor. That love lasts. That love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:7)

faith practice in daily life

Serve all people following the example of Jesus

What better goal is there than to learn to love in our daily life? We love not because those around us are adorable and easy to love. No, we love because God claimed us in our baptism, connected us to the body of Christ, and sent us into the world to share God’s love with others. This is the excellent way described by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians.

6. *What about love is there to practice?*
7. *What is lasting about love?*

Yet, this excellent way of love can be lost in the demands of living. Paul’s beautiful words remind us of the priority of love in our life. Perhaps it is time to make love a priority for this day – one day at a time.

8. *How might you practice love today?*
9. *Do you agree with Paul that love is a “more excellent way”? How so?*

Prayer

Creator of love, teach us to love as Christ loved. Help us to mature in our ability to love, and find ways to extend your love to others. Amen

last word

Repeat the adapted words of 1 Corinthians at the top of this page (see above) every day this week.

Daily Faith Practices

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