

“Love?”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The text that engages us this morning in from our epistle reading, particularly 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a. “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.” Amen. So stands God’s Word. Amen.

“Love.” What is love? How do you show love to those around you? Paul makes a statement that we use to close our text for this morning, “Love never ends.” How can Paul possibly make that statement? At this moment in history where the world is in conflict, and our own country seems to be fractured and splintered; with the various conflicting groups not merely, not loving, but quite literally hating the other side. But again, I ask, how do you show love? Do you show love only to those who show love to you? Do you show love to those who hate you, to your enemies? We tend to talk a good game when it comes to love. We “love” our homes and our cars, we “love” it if our favorite sports team wins the big game, we “love” it if our favorite movie or song wins the big award; we can also “love” our favorite foods, for example ice cream or chocolate. We say that we love our children and our families. When we get married, we pledge to

“love,” honor and keep as long as we both live. But is that the love that Paul is telling us about; is that the love Paul is talking about? Because, let’s face it, we are not very good when it comes to really and truly loving as we claim too.

We all realize all too well that human love has a beginning, and it has an end. We speak in terms of “falling in love” and of “falling out of love.” Marriages that begin with husband and wife declaring their love for one another come to an end as these same two people cannot even be in the same room with one another. It’s so funny too because part of this text from 1 Corinthians 13 is a popular text for marriage sermons. But we see parents and children who become estranged from one another. That even this familial love falls apart. So, it goes without saying that even the best of friends who would proclaim brotherly love for each other will often also have a falling out over some issue and never speak again. Many times, the issues that result in anger and strife between family and friends has a basis in a self-serving, self-important and what is the most I can get out of this relationship with the least amount of effort? To put it simply, it’s our natural selfishness and sinfulness.

In Deuteronomy 6:5 we read, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Jesus confirms this in His answer to the lawyer who asks Him in Matthew 22 “Which is the great commandment in the Law?” Jesus gives him that same answer of “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” But He then goes on to add, “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But we all know that we don’t do either of these things. We do not love God with all our heart, soul, and

might. We prove many times that not only do we not love our neighbor, but, we could not care less about their welfare.

It's good to look at what Paul says here about love. First let's look at what Paul tells us love isn't. He says that love does not envy or boast. Love is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. Love is not irritable or resentful. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoings. Yes, Paul is writing to the people in Corinth about these things because there was a lot of pride and boastfulness going on. Paul gives them this list of all of these things that love is not. But each one of these things is also written for us and is something that we have also been guilty of against and before God and against our neighbor. Even though Jesus Himself has commanded us in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

But Paul also tells us what love is. He writes that love is patient and kind and that it bears, believes, and endures all things. Now Paul is not saying that it doesn't matter what we believe, bear, and endure as if the content doesn't matter. What Paul is talking about is that love supports, trusts, and is faithful without limits. In other words, love never gives up. How awesome is that and how wonderful it would be if our love for one another, if our love for our enemy, if our love for the unbeliever never gave up. But until that day when we are made perfect our love will always fall short. Because, again, even our love for God falls short of what it should be. Paul also talks about a different day in this reading. Paul says that for now we only know in part; then we shall know fully even as we are fully known. So, all of these things that we so like to boast about and that the

people of Corinth boasted about are not complete because we are not perfect. These are also things that they and we do not do out of love, but we do for ourselves. These things that are not done in love do no good, they do not build up the one body of Christ, and they do not serve the Gospel. As Paul tells us right from the start that if he is not acting in love all that people will hear is just a bunch of noise. The same is true for us; when people see that we are supposed to be Christians but do not have love, not even love for one another, what message are we really sending? But we know that we can not love on our own. We know that we love God because He loved us first and that because of His love in us that enables us to show love for the neighbor. That love was shown as God sent His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Father sent His Son to be our Savior. In order to be our Savior Jesus had to suffer and die. Jesus had to, “be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” By doing this He endures God’s wrath against sin and disobedience. By doing this He showed His love for us and for all people. He showed this love for us while we were still His enemies.

Because of this great and limitless love that God has shown us we are children of God. We have been brought from the darkness of death into the light of life. We are brought to faith in what Jesus has done for us through the Word and the Sacraments and are given the gift of faith and the Holy Spirit; all for free, without merit or worthiness on our part, and all because of God’s love for us through Christ. Then through that same Spirit we are empowered to show that love to one another as we remember our baptisms as Luther says and drown the old Adam within. 1 John 4:16 tells us, “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in

love abides in God, and God abides in him. God through His grace shown to us in Christ and His atoning sacrifice for our sins indeed abides in us and forgives us all of our sins. That is what Paul is talking about, that is real love; the love of God for us in Christ. What wondrous love this is. Amen.

The peace of God that passes all understanding forever keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.