

“Without Love, I Am Nothing,” I Cor. 12:31—13:13, Epiphany 4-C, Feb. 3, 2019

A first-grade girl was invited to the home of a fellow classmate one evening for supper! The mother, who was hosting the meal, asked the invited guest rather politely, “**Shirley, I was planning to make ‘buttered broccoli’** for our vegetable this evening! Do you like broccoli!”

“**Oh, yes Ma’am, I love broccoli**” Shirley replied. But later that evening, the host mother couldn’t help but notice, that when the **buttered broccoli was passed around the table**, that her little invited guest refused to take any!

The mom said, “**Excuse me, Shirley, I thought you said that you *love* broccoli!**”

“**I do love broccoli,**” Shirley replied to her friend’s mom, “**but not enough to eat it!**”

Friends, here is a classic case of a **little girl who loved broccoli in an ABSTRACT WAY**, but certainly did not love it in a **CONCRETE WAY!** And can’t we all be just like Shirley, at times, too!?! Especially if someone were to ask **YOU** or **ME**: “**Do you love your family?**” And “**Do you love your church family?**”

IT’S SO EASY FOR US TO ALLOW THE WORDS SIMPLY TO SPILL OUT OF OUR MOUTHS RATHER RAPIDLY: “**Yes, I love my family!**” And “**Yes, I love my church family!**” But all too often we forget, like that old-adage reminds us, the “**PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING!**”

We forget that there is a big difference between an **ABSTRACT NOUN**, and its opposite, that is classified today, in most **English Grammar Books**, as a **CONCRETE NOUN**.

An abstract noun denotes an **idea, quality, or state of being**, rather than a **concrete object**. Examples of abstract nouns are: **Liberty, anger, freedom, love** and **democracy**. These kinds of nouns express ideas, concepts, or qualities that cannot be seen with our physical eyes.

CONCRETE NOUNS, on the other hand, are **PEOPLE, PLACES** and **THINGS** that we can **experience with our five senses**. Concrete nouns are something that you can **see, hear, touch, taste** or **smell**.

True love does not come to us as a **PHYSICAL COMMODITY**.

You cannot purchase LOVE from the **corner bakery downtown** in the same way that you can **purchase some of your favorite pastries**. You can not acquire love for yourself, like your favorite **cold cuts**, that are wrapped up in **shiny white paper** and handed to you at the local **deli**. Nor can you **smear LOVE on a glass slide** and examine it in the same way that you might examine a few drops of **POND WATER** under a **microscope**.

Friends, there is no mistake about it! When St. Paul writes the opening words of this letter to the Church at Corinth, he tells them that he is always giving thanks to God for them, because of the way that the grace of God had been poured out upon them so very lavishly in Jesus Christ!

Paul writes: “**In every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift!**” And in the chapter 12, the previous chapter to our Epistle Lesson (I Corinthians 12:31—13:13) St. Paul **specifically names some of these great spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit had poured out upon them:**

- “**To one is given through the Spirit the *utterance of wisdom!***
- **To another *faith* by the same Spirit!**”

Although, when St. Paul speaks of “faith,” in this particular instance, he was not talking about “**saving faith**”; that all true believers possess, but instead the **gift that some believers have**,

to take on enormous challenges, because they have also been blessed with a positive mental attitude. These are people who say with St. Paul, ***“We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us” (Philippians 4:13).***

- Some of the believers at Corinth were ***blessed with the gift of healing!***
- Others were able to ***perform miracles!***
- Some were given ***prophetic gifts;*** meaning that they had the ability to speak forth the Word of God, very plainly, for others in a clear and concise manner.
- Some had the ability to ***speak in tongues!***
- While others had the ability to ***interpret the messages being spoken by those who were speaking in unintelligible tongues!***

ALL THROUGHOUT CHAPTER 12, PAUL IS PRAISING GOD FOR THE MANIFOLD SPIRITUAL GIFTS THAT HAD BEEN POURED OUT UPON THE BELIEVERS IN CORINTH.

But, unfortunately, many of these believers, **ALL OF THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THEY HAD RECEIVED, THEY HAD NOT YET RECEIVED THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT.**

And there is a gigantic difference between **GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT** and **FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT!** In **Galatians 5:22**, St. Paul names the fruits of the Spirit : ***“Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control!”***

You see, my friends, these believers had **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**, BUT THEY DID NOT HAVE THE **SPIRITUAL FRUITS OF FAITH;** ESPECIALLY THE MOST **IMPORTANT SPIRITUAL FRUIT OF ALL, from which all the other fruits must proceed!** THEY LACKED THE **SPIRITUAL FRUIT OF LOVE.**

Instead of the believers at Corinth **genuinely working together in a spirit of mutual-cooperation,** they found themselves instead, **battling one another in spirit of competition!**

You know, friends, I just love the **Hymn of the Day**, we sang a few moments ago, don't you?

*Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heaven to earth come down!
Fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love you are!
Visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart!*

But if the Church at Corinth had a favorite **Hymn of the Day** that they might have sung with great frequency in their day, it could have easily been the words that **Irving Berlin** wrote for a **Broadway Play** entitled: **“Annie Get Your Guns!”** These are words, that the characters Annie Oakley and Frank Butler sing back and forth to one another: **“Anything you can do, I can do better, I can do anything better than you! No, you can't! Yes, I can! No, you can't! Yes, I can! Anything you can do, I can do better, I can do anything better than you!”**

Friends, I know that I am speaking to a very mature audience this morning, and I am sure that some of you can remember, way back to 1960, when a hit song was first recorded by **Anita Bryan**, that was later rerecorded, 13 years later, in **1973**, by **Marie Osmond**, entitled: **“PAPER ROSES.”**

And the lyrics to that song when like this: **“Paper roses. Paper roses. Oh, how real those roses seem to be! But they are only imitation, like your imitation love to me!”**

The sin that St. Paul is addressing in our epistle lesson this morning is, to a large degree, the sin of our attempting to pass off an **IMITATION LOVE** for true love!

On the night before our Savior died on the cross for our sins to reconcile us wayward sinners to our Heavenly Father, he did some very significant things in the Upper Room that evening, like: Washing the disciples' feet, celebrating the Passover with his disciples one last time, and his instituting the Sacrament of Holy Communion that you and I are privileged to celebrate again today. Jesus said, *"I have given you examples to follow, blessed are you, IF YOU DO THESE THINGS"* (John 13:12-17)!

But Jesus said something else very significant on that evening too: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you! By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"* (John 13:34-35)!

I can remember being a student at Concordia Seminary, years ago, and one of the professors I had on learning how to preach the Word of God, Dr. Richard Schultz, he told us: **"SOME TEXTS ALMOST PREACH THEMSELVES!"** And then he told us that one classic example of this is to be found in I Corinthians 13!"

I want to quote the words of this great **LOVE CHAPTER** of the Bible to you again, but this time out of a Bible that was published in 1971 known as the **LIVING BIBLE**.

"If I had the gift of being able to speak in other languages without learning them and could speak in every language there is in all of heaven and earth but didn't love others. I would only be making noise.

If I had the gift of prophecy and knew all about what is going to happen in the future, knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would it do?

Even if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, I would still be worth nothing at all without love. If I gave everything I have to poor people, and if I were burned alive for preaching the Gospel but didn't love others, it would be of no value whatever.

Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude.

Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong!

It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever truth wins out!

If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him.

All the special gifts and powers from God will someday come to an end, but love goes on forever. Someday prophecy, and speaking in unknown tongues, and special knowledge—these gifts will disappear.

Now we know so little, even with our special gifts, and the preaching of those most gifted is still so poor. But when we have been made perfect and complete, then the need for these inadequate special gifts will come to an end, and they will disappear.

It's like this: When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I became a man, my thoughts grew far beyond those of my childhood, and now I have put away the childish things.

In the same way, we can see and understand only a little about God now, as if we were peering at his reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we are going to see him in his completeness, face to face.

Now all that I know is hazy and blurred, but then I will see everything clearly, just as clearly as God sees into my heart right now!

There are three things that remain: Faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love!"

Friends, no matter how hard we try to love one another in the same way that God loves us, and no matter how hard we try to love other people in the same way that God loves us, let's remember that we are only **AMATEURS**, when it comes to our loving one another and our loving other people at best!

GOD IS THE ONLY TRUE PROFESSIONAL, PERFECT LOVER IN ALL THE UNIVERSE. And John says: *"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever*

believes in him should not perish but have eternal life! For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him" (John 3:16-17).

I am glad that when we confess our sins to the LORD God together, at the outset of every Sunday morning worship service, that we do so by our making a confession of our sins together, so that we might receive the forgiveness of our sins, together too.

When we confess our sins, we are admitting our inability to love God or other people perfectly. We say: *"Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have not loved you with our whole heart and we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves!"*

And so what do we deserve from God? "We justly deserve your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name. Amen."

But doesn't mean that as we live in the power of our Baptism, day after day, that we should not strive with the help of the Holy Spirit to do better!

Friends, we all know that it is a sin for one person to physically assault another person, unless we are assaulting another person only to defend ourselves or other people!

But we so often forget that the Bible tells us that some of the most-deadly assaults we can make upon one another is with our tongues!

In the TEN COMMANDMENTS, God says, "Don't use my name in vain! For the person who uses my name in vain, will certainly answer for this on the last day!"

But also God teaches us in the Eighth Commandment not to take each other's names in vain either!" Do you remember the 8th Commandment: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor?"

What does this mean: "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him and explain everything in the kindest way!"

St. James certainly doesn't mince any words about this either, does he, in his New Testament letter? Here he writes: ***"Anyone who says he is a Christian but doesn't control his sharp tongue is just fooling himself, and his religion isn't worth much! We can make a large horse turn around and go wherever we want by means of a small bit in his mouth. And a tiny rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot wants it to go, even though the winds are strong!"***

So also, the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A great forest can be set on fire by one tiny spark. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness and poisons every part of the body. And the tongue is set on fire by hell itself, and can turn our whole lives into a blazing flame of destruction and disaster.

Men have trained, or can train, every kind of animal or bird that lives and every kind of reptile and fish, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is always ready to pour out its deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Heavenly Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against men who are made like God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Dear brothers, surely this is not right" (James 1:26; 3:3-10)!

Again St. Paul says to us in verse 5: "Love does not demand its own way!"

And don't we see this lived out perfectly in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Three times he fell on his face in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying: 'Father if it be possible, remove this cup from me! Yet, not my will but yours be done!'

St. Paul says it like this: "Let this mind be in you, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who although he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God as something to be grasped, but he emptied himself and took on the form of a servant and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross! Wherefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every other name in heaven or on earth!"

His name is LORD, THE "ONE WHO CAUSES ALL THING TO BE," THE ETERNALLY SOVEREIGN ONE WHO WORKS ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM THAT LOVE HIM AND ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE" (Romans 8:28). Amen