

**1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13**  
**"God is Love"**  
**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany**

**January 30/31, 2016**  
**Our Redeemer Lutheran**  
**Vicar Peter Adelsen**

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Intro]**

Tolerance says, "You must approve of what I do."

Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will love you, even when your behavior offends me."

Tolerance says, "You must agree with me."

Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will tell you the truth, because I am convinced 'the truth will set you free.'"

Tolerance says, "You must allow me to have my way."

Love responds, "I must do something harder: I will plead with you to follow the right way, because I believe you are worth the risk."

Tolerance seeks to be inoffensive; love takes risks.

Tolerance glorifies division; love seeks unity. Tolerance costs nothing; love costs everything.<sup>1</sup>

**[Ideas on Love]**

In today's world, each of us have differing ideas on the meaning of love.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when somebody asks you, "What do you love?" A lot of ideas may go through your mind.

Do you say, "I love strawberries"? Do you say, "I love running"? Do you say, "I love *fill in the blank*"? Do you say, "Love is tolerating a differing opinion"?

You may desire strawberries, but that isn't love. You may find pleasure in running, but that isn't love. You may like the idea of tolerance, but that isn't love.

What is love anyway?

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<sup>1</sup> Josh McDowell, Focus on the Family magazine, 1999.

The world would say, love is a strong affection for another; or, being unselfishly loyal and having a benevolent concern for the good of another.

That's a pretty good definition, but there is more to the meaning of love. Love is deeper than that broad definition.

### ***[The More Excellent Way]***

The Apostle Paul in today's epistle answers that longing question: What is love?

***“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.”*** (1 Cor. 13:4-6)

So what is Paul saying?

Love is longsuffering. Love is steadfast. Love is eternal.

Love does not delight in evil. It isn't glad when evil or injustice is done. Instead, it “rejoices with the truth.” Here truth and righteousness are the same. Love is not softness. It doesn't erase the boundary between right and wrong.

Love isn't tolerating sinful behavior. Love is informing the sinner of their sin.

“If you spend too much time with false teachers, you will eventually share in their false doctrine, lies and errors. If you play with tar, you're going to get dirty.<sup>2</sup>”

“Shouldn't a person do good things for (those false teachers) and by doing so make them feel guilty and ashamed? Yes, we should hate them (as Luther says), but only in regard to their false teachings. Otherwise, we must be ready to serve our enemies so that we might be able to convert some of them. We need to love them as people, but hate what they teach.

***“(Love) does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.”*** (v. 6)

Paul is showing the Church at Corinth and us, the more excellent way – the way of love.

### ***[Who teaches us love?]***

How do we come to understand what love is? Who teaches us what love is?

***“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol.”*** (v. 1)

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, Luther's Works 12:193.

Paul is saying that without love, what you say does not make any sense. It makes as much sense as a person clanging a symbol repeatedly with no purpose in the song.

***“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.”*** (v. 2)

Even if you have the ability to predict storms, predicts wins and losses for sports teams, predict the winning lottery numbers, or to even move mountains, it’s all useless without love.

***“If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but not have love. I gain nothing.”*** (v. 3)

Supreme sacrifices are nothing if Christian love does not inspire them. In one grand sweep, we could turn over everything we own to charity; in one splendid sacrifice, we could give our lives in fiery martyrdom for a noble cause, but if such sacrifices were brought without Christian love, they would be nothing.

So who teaches us about love?

What if I changed those verses slightly?

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not **God**, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol.

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 **God**, I am nothing.

If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but not have **God**, I gain nothing.

You see, God is love. ***“Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*** (1 John 4:7-8)

***[Love Never Ends]***

***Love never ends.*** In verses eight and nine, Paul explains that love is permanent. Speaking in tongues and prophesying is only temporary.

Your desire for strawberries or any other food will end. Your pleasure in running or participating in any other sport will end. Your concept of tolerance will end.

God's love for us all never ends. That is why God the Father sent His Son Jesus Christ to serve as the only sacrifice for our sins upon the cross. Through His death and resurrection, we have the faith and hope of eternal life while in this world.

Each one of us here today will have their life end. Within our earthly life, we have faith, hope and love. When we die, we will no longer have any need for faith and hope, because we will see with our own eyes Jesus Christ and the new heaven and new earth. That is why Paul says, ***“So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*** (v. 13)

Love is eternal, we will endure through eternity with Him in the new heaven and new earth. Amen.

Now, let us make a joyful noise unto the Lord! Amen!